City of Westminster

CITY PLAN
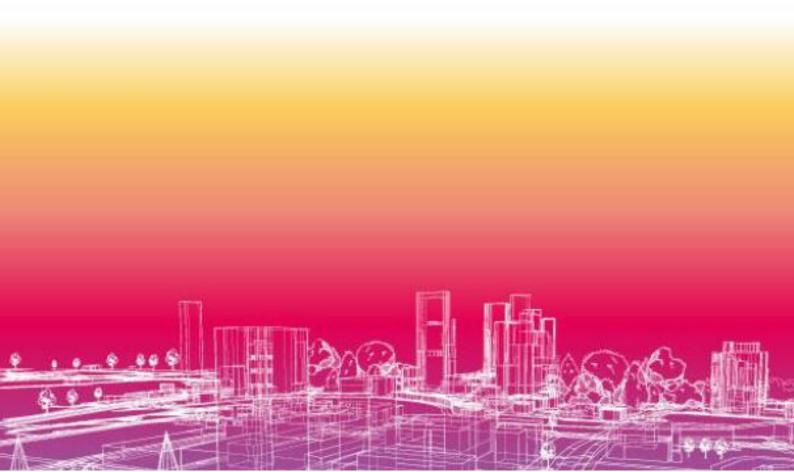
WESTMINSTER'S STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT 2023

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Introduction

What is the Statement of Community Involvement?

As a council we recognise the importance of community engagement in the planning process, to make the best-informed decisions we need to hear from those in the communities who will feel the impact of development. We are committed to working with our residents and local stakeholders to build trust and remove existing barriers to anyone who wants to influence decisions that will affect them.

The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is a statutory document which sets out how the council carries out consultation and effectively engages the community in carrying out its planning duties. The SCI states our approach to engaging with anyone who may have an interest in development that is happening around them. This new SCI will improve the way we engage with our communities in the planning process.

What is Town Planning?

The planning system manages how land and buildings are used, considering the detailed design of buildings, the provision of open space, housing and commercial development and transport. Town Planners have to balance how they will meet social, economic and environmental objectives. The key planning functions carried out by local authorities are:

- Plan making – *which sets out policies to guide development and planning decisions over time;*

- Determining planning applications – *decisions on whether or not a proposed development should receive planning permission, based on adopted planning policies and other considerations.*

Not all forms of development require planning permission from the council as some types of development, such as small extensions to the rear of some residential properties, or some changes of use, are covered by 'permitted development rights'[1]. For development proposals in Westminster that do require planning permission, the council is responsible for consulting with the community and deciding whether the development should go ahead based on the policies in the development plan.

In Westminster, decisions on planning applications are based on council's statutory Development Plan which includes the London Plan, Westminster's City Plan 2019-2040, and any 'made' Neighbourhood Plans.

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[1] Further advice on permitted development rights is provided by the Planning Portal here.

How our approach to community involvement was shaped

Westminster's previous SCI was published in 2014. Since then, not only have the council's planning policies evolved with the new Westminster City Plan being adopted in 2021, but the way we interact with communities has also changed. New technologies have emerged, such as online engagement tools and social media channels, which can help us reach out to more people. During the Covid-19 pandemic we implemented new digital ways of involving people in the planning process, which we want to build on for future engagement with our communities, in addition to traditional consultation methods.

It is important that we hear directly from our communities on what we are doing well and what we can improve so that they can tell us the best way to engage with them. Feedback from our amenity societies highlighted that our consultations can sometimes be too technical and that they can also be overwhelming as the wider council can launch multiple consultations at the same time. As a result of this we have created a central consultation hub on our website which highlights upcoming engagement activities so that communities have significant notice to plan and formulate their responses.

To better understand how our communities want the council to engage with them, we hosted in person listening sessions in summer 2022 to give residents a space to discuss what we could do better and to test assumptions such as what do residents know about planning and how they can get involved and what barriers to engagement are existing. The feedback following the session was very positive with the attendees showing a genuine interest in being more involved in the planning process and the key takeaways were:

- they heard things too late in the process, often when the scheme is already in the planning application stage
- sometimes planning is not visible and could be promoted wider using newsletters and printed media beyond email notifications.
- the planning system is very complex, and it can be hard to understand without providing visuals and presenting the information in the correct way.
- young people do not hear about planning.

In October 2022 the council launched its new Fairer Westminster strategy which aims to put residents at the heart of our decisions in determining the future of the city. In the spirit of this, we have used the results of the listening and engagement sessions to shape this SCI.

We consulted on the SCI for a period of six weeks from 31 January 2023 until 14 March 2023. Comments received from the community as a result of the consultation have been taken onboard and, where possible, have been incorporated into the current version of the document.

Our approach to community involvement

We value genuine community involvement because local people know and understand their area better than anyone else. We want our community members to have a say in how their area is being shaped so that they feel invested in the future change.

Westminster is a densely populated city with a diverse mixture of cultures and people of different backgrounds. The city is home to some of the most affluent neighbourhoods as well as some of the most deprived in the country. The number of people within the city boundary during the day can grow to over 1 million thanks to the strong visitor and tourist economy and vibrant nightlife. Development in the city has the potential to affect a range of people in different ways. We believe it is important that different voices are heard in the planning process and that people can get involved in a way that works for them.

We need to involve and engage communities at the most relevant stages where there is the best opportunity for them to contribute and inform policies and schemes. –We will use a range of specific tools and engagement methods/activities to involve communities in planning, which may differ depending on the planning stage. Sometimes community involvement may only focus on informing, whilst on other occasions it may require consultation or co-production and partnership working. This SCI explains how and when we will use these different tools.

Principles of engagement

Our principles for engagement set out the key objectives and guidelines for all planning activities. The purpose of these principles will be to ensure consistency and that we are carrying our community involvement activities to the best possible standards.

1. **Early engagement**
   Actively working to frontload engagement so that our residents and other stakeholders are informed and consulted early in the planning process to ensure the best chance of their inputs positively influencing decisions.

2. **Inclusive engagement**
   Proactive approach to ensure that our consultations and engagement activities have a broad reach and that all voices from all backgrounds are able to influence planning decisions and policy directions.

3. **Use of appropriate consultation methods**
   When planning consultations and engagement activities we will consider the best channels and methods of communication to ensure we effectively reach our intended audiences. The type of involvement required may vary depending on the activity. We will be open to exploring new consultation technologies that emerge such as new digital tools.

4. Clear information and simple communications
We will strive to provide information on the topic, scope and aims of the engagement as well as guidance on how to provide feedback in a manner that is as clear and concise as possible. This enables residents and other stakeholders to understand the scope and purpose of engagement activities and easily take part in them. We will ensure information can be easily found and accessed.

5. Transparent records and feedback
We will communicate clearly how stakeholder inputs have been considered and make key information and outcomes of engagement publicly available.

How we involve the community in planning

This chapter details how we will meet our legislative requirements in engaging the community in different aspects of the planning system including policy and specific planning applications. It also sets out the new and innovative tools and consultation methods we may use where relevant to reach a wider audience.

Planning policy

What is planning policy?

Planning policy is concerned with shaping the long-term vision for development in Westminster. It sets out plans and policies against which planning applications are determined.

National policy	The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the government's planning policies and how they expect they to be applied.
Regional policy	The London Plan is prepared by the Mayor of London (Greater London Authority) and sets out the strategic policies for London as a whole.
Local policy	Westminster's local plan (the City Plan) sets out the framework for long term growth in the City of Westminster. The local plan guides planning decisions in the area. Supplementary Planning Documents provide additional detail on the policies in the local plan.
Neighbourhood policy	Neighbourhood Plans are produced by neighbourhood forums and community councils and address policy issues at a neighbourhood level.

Planning policy is set out at national, regional, local and neighbourhood levels. The London Plan, Westminster's City Plan and any made neighbourhood plans together form Westminster's development plan which all planning applications are assessed against. These different levels of the plan are designed to work together to achieve the goals of the plan while also taking into account the unique needs and characteristics of a local area within the city.

Plans and policies must go through various stages of public consultation as they are being prepared and they must also be generally consistent with higher level plans. Community involvement is an important part of planning policy, making sure different views and interests are represented. Alongside community involvement, planning policies produced by the council are also informed by Equality Impact Assessments, to ensure potential negative impacts on certain groups are fully considered during policy development.

Our three year work programme for planning policy documents is set out in the Local Development Scheme, which can be accessed on our website.

We annually publish Authority Monitoring Reports (AMRs) to monitor the local plan. These reports review and assess current planning policies and whether they are effective. The AMR monitors if the objectives of the policies have been achieved, and may inform if a local plan or some of its policies need to be reviewed. The latest AMR can be found on our website.

Who will we engage with in plan-making?

We work closely with a number of partners across the city to develop and deliver our policies and strategies. Some of these partners are statutory consultees as set out by regulations, however we also engage closely with the following stakeholders who have an interest in shaping future development:

- Residents
- Community groups
- Local businesses
- Landowners and developers
- Special interest groups

The council maintains a planning consultation database containing individuals, organisations and groups which have signed up to receive email alerts on planning policy activity.

If you would like to request to be added to our database please sign up on our website or email planningpolicy@westminster.gov.uk.

When enrolling on the planning consultation database please note that Westminster City Council will capture and store some personal details. We will use this information to ensure that you are consulted on planning issues across Westminster. These details will be kept by Westminster City Council and will only be used for the purpose set out above. Your personal details will remain with us until you wish to no longer be consulted.

What are the different stages in plan-making and how will we engage during them?

Plan-making consists of different stages that are set out in regulations. The statutory requirements for each type of plan are slightly different, although they broadly follow similar stages.

Figure 1 sets out the statutory stages for the different types of plan as set out in regulations. They also apply to the review of these plans. The following section will provide more detail on the requirements for each type of plan, setting out what we will do as a minimum.

We may go over and beyond the minimum requirements described in these sections by:

- Adding additional rounds of informal consultation;
- Extending consultations beyond the minimum timescales required by Regulations to give respondents extra time to review and formulate comments where we think this may be necessary;

- Organising additional engagement activities outside of the consultation period.

Where possible we will avoid busy periods (e.g. school holidays) for our statutory consultation periods to provide as many people as possible the opportunity to take part.

Figure 1: Statutory stages in plan-making

	Local Plan and other Development Plan Documents	**Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)**	**Neighbourhood Plans**	**Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule**
Stage 1	Initial consultation (Regulation 18)	Consultation on draft SPD	Pre-submission consultation organised by the forum (Regulation 14)	Consultation on draft charging schedule
Stage 2	Publication consultation (Regulation 19)	Adoption of SPD	Submission consultation organised by the council (Regulation 16)	Examination and publication
Stage 3	Submission to the Secretary of State		Submission to the Examiner	
Stage 4	Examination and adoption		Examination, referendum and adoption	

Local Plan

The Local Plan guides decisions on future development proposals and addresses the needs and opportunities of the area. The local plan for Westminster is called the 'City Plan'.

The policies set out within the City Plan must be drafted in consistency with the NPPF. Local plans usually look 15-20 years into the future and the council is required by legislation to review the plan at least every five years.

There are different statutory stages for the preparation of a local plan, as set out in figure 1 above. The consultations should last for at least six weeks, and documents will be made available on our website, at City Hall and libraries. As a minimum, we will notify specific and general consultation bodies, and those who have asked to be notified. We will consider the representations received to inform the local plan.

During examination (Stage 4), an independent and external Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State will consider the representations made and may invite those who have expressed to have an interest (through the stage 2 consultation) in participating in hearing sessions to discuss the issues raised. Hearing sessions

are open to the public to observe. Additional public consultation may be carried out as part of the examination if any major changes are needed to the local plan.

When the local plan is adopted, specific and general consultation bodies will be notified together with those who have asked to be notified. Published documents will be available online and at City Hall for inspection.

Supplementary Planning Documents

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) provide additional detail to the policies which are set out in the local plan. They provide advice and guidance on specific topics and once adopted become a material consideration in decision-making. SPDs cannot introduce new policy and must conform with national and London Plan policies.

Preparation of an SPD also comprises of a number of stages as set out in figure 1. In addition to these statutory stages, we will carry out targeted engagement with relevant stakeholders where necessary.

We will publicly consult on new SPDs for a minimum of six weeks to allow adequate time for responses. During consultation we will notify our planning database, relevant stakeholders and documents will be made available for download from our website.

Current and recent consultations can be found here. Adopted SPDs can be viewed here.

Following the consultation on the SPD we will then consider comments received and may carry out further engagement if required before adopting the SPD, for example if we have made significant changes to the document following the first round of consultation.

SPDs differ from local plans as they do not require to go through an examination to be adopted.

Neighbourhood Plans

Neighbourhood Planning is a tool designed to give communities more influence on future development in their area. Neighbourhood plans, like local plans, set out policy for a specific local area. They are led by the designated neighbourhood forum or community council. Neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies set out in the adopted development plan.

It is the responsibility of the neighbourhood forum to make sure effective community engagement takes place to inform the neighbourhood plan. The Forum or Community Council owns their Plan and is responsible for drafting and evidencing the policies within, however the council has a supporting role in guiding the forum through the neighbourhood planning stages. We have developed a Neighbourhood Planning Guide to offer guidance to designated

neighbourhood groups on the step by step process of producing a neighbourhood plan.

Any initial community engagement work, the first formal round of consultation called pre-submission (Stage 1), and any engagement leading up to the submission of the draft neighbourhood plan to the council is the responsibility of the neighbourhood forum.

Following submission of the draft neighbourhood plan, the council will be responsible for organising a submission consultation (Stage 2). This will include notifying statutory consultation bodies, those that have responded previously to neighbourhood plan consultations, and publicising the plan to anyone who lives, works, or does business in the area. The forum may help publicise the plan locally.

The plan must then go through an examination (Stage 3) where an appointed examiner will review whether the basic conditions set out in Regulations for a neighbourhood plan have been met. Although it is up to the council to appoint an examiner, we will take the decision with the forum.

Once examination is complete the examiner will produce a report setting out whether modifications to the plan will be required for it to proceed to a referendum. The modifications are not consulted on however they do form part of the referendum.

If the basic conditions have been met, then a referendum can take place (Stage 4). We will provide at least 28 working days' notice that the referendum is going to take place and we will publicise the details of the referendum on our [neighbourhood planning webpage.](#)

During a referendum those living in the area are asked to cast their vote on whether they support adoption of the plan. Although it is it our responsibility to carry out the administrative side, the forum must publicise the referendum and campaign for a yes vote, the council must remain impartial.

If the neighbourhood plan has been drawn up for a neighbourhood business area a separate business referendum must also take place. Local businesses will be approached by the council to enter the business voting register. Only businesses which are on the register will be eligible to vote in the referendum.

For the plan to be formally adopted more than 50% of the votes casted must be in support of the plan. If this is the case the plan has weight and the Cabinet member for Planning can make the formal decision to adopt the plan. It will then form part of the statutory development plan.

Community Infrastructure Levy

The Community Infrastructure Levy is a charge that can be levied by a local authority on development in the area. It is an important tool for the council to help deliver infrastructure needed in Westminster.

CIL applies to areas where we have consulted on and approved a charging schedule which sets out the levy rates. This is published on the council's website and can be found here.

It is important that those potentially affected by a CIL charge in an area could have their say on the charging schedule. The regulations therefore set out two statutory consultation stages of consultation that have to be followed.

Following the preparation of evidence, the council will prepare a draft charging schedule which we will consult on. As a minimum we will invite neighbouring boroughs, the Mayor of London, Community Councils and Neighbourhood Forums, and those other stakeholders on our planning policy database to provide representations. We will also engage with the local community, developers, major landowners, BID's and local stakeholders as we see relevant.

All representations will be considered by the council before submitting the draft charging schedule for examination. An independent examiner will then examine the charging schedule in public, after which they will make their recommendations public. The council will then have regard to these recommendations before approving the charging schedule.

In Westminster, neighbourhood and community groups have the possibility to influence how a proportion of CIL is spent through bidding for 'Neighbourhood CIL'. More information on Neighbourhood CIL and how to make a bid can be found on our website.

How will we engage in policy-making?

In the early stages of plan-making we may reach out to communities to shape the objectives of the plan and help form its evidence base. This may include targeted activities with specific stakeholders or groups, or online activities.

During public consultations, we will directly notify statutory consultees and anyone else who may have an interest in being involved. We will do this by emailing our planning consultation database with alerts of key stages and we will also regularly update the relevant planning policy webpages as a minimum. In cases where we see suitable we will also utilise alternative consultation tools and techniques to widen our reach.

We aim to go over and beyond the minimum requirements set out in regulations. This section sets out how we maximise the accessibility of our public consultations, how we use different methods, and engage with stakeholders throughout the policy-making process.

When planning any consultation or engagement activity we will refer to our 'Good practice checklist' set out in the appendix (Item 3).

Maximising the accessibility of public consultations

We want to make sure that our consultations reach a wide range of diverse groups and individuals. To make public consultations as accessible as possible, we make sure that any consultation and engagement materials are as clear and concise as possible, written in plain English and avoiding jargon where possible, explaining terminology where it is necessary to use it.

We want our engagement activities to reach beyond the usual participants and include the 'seldom heard'. These are people within our communities who we may be less likely to hear from for a variety of reasons. These seldom heard groups may include:

- Those whose first language is not English
- People who visit Westminster for work or leisure purposes but do not live in the city
- People of working age and have limited time, for example due to family commitments
- Young people including students and school aged children
- People who struggle to access the internet
- People with mobility issues who find it less easy to travel to consultation events
- People with sight or hearing impairments

We have identified the following measures that we may use to maximise the accessibility of our consultation and engagement activities:

- Hosting in person workshops and events in accessible locations at a suitable time. This type of in person engagement may be preferred by those who have difficulties accessing the internet. It can also help to reach those who visit Westminster, not just those who live here.
- Providing hard copies of documents in different languages and formats, where requested, to help those with language barriers or access impairments.
- Working with community leaders and local organisations to reach different parts of the community. For example, our neighbourhood forums, amenity societies, residents associations, religious leaders, local business community and other local groups.
- Encouraging young people to be involved in the planning process by working with schools and youth organisations, for example through the Westminster Youth Council and the council's youth engagement programme, City Lions.
- Utilising our existing audience on social media to promote consultations. Social media can also be used to target specific groups, for example by age and location.
- Exploring new innovative online tools such as virtual reality technology and digital interactive mapping platforms.
- Promoting consultations in areas which are frequently visited by specific groups, for example:

- o Transport hubs and busy public spaces for those who work within or visit Westminster;
- o Street markets, libraries and leisure centres which are visited by local people.

We will continually review our approach to consultation and will seek to provide more support for communities when engaging in consultation on planning applications to put them on an even footing with developers.

The different engagement and consultation methods

We have a number of tools available to us which we may use depending on the type of engagement or consultation and the target audience.

Email alerts	Emails are sent to everyone registered on our planning database to notify them of different stages of plan making and invite comments on open consultations. We have over 1,000 stakeholders within our planning database. It contains a mixture of residents, businesses, developers, statutory consultees, local businesses, neighbouring local authorities and more. It is regularly updated and promoted so that those who are interested can sign up.
Council webpages	We will update the relevant webpages during the different stages of plan production. This is also where documents will be made available for download.
Social media	We have a number of social media channels which we utilise to reach a high number of viewers. Formal consultation events may be posted and promoted on the following platforms: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram.
Local media	We may promote consultation activity using local or regional newspapers, radio stations, online media and online newsletters.
Council meetings	We have a number of existing public meetings and committees that happen on a regular basis. For example, Full Council, Council Sub committees, Scrutiny committees. Where appropriate we may take our consultation activities and emerging plans to these meetings to raise awareness or seek feedback or approval.
Community events and presentations	We may give presentations and attend community events to promote our consultation activity within the community for example attending the forum of forums meeting.

Focus groups and workshops	Where appropriate we may invite stakeholders and partners to discuss a specific topic or consultation. For example to help stakeholders understand technically difficult planning issues.
Newsletters	The council has a number of existing newsletters that it circulates to residents and stakeholders which we can use to promote planning consultations when necessary.
Leaflets and flyers	At the relevant stages we may distribute materials to our libraries, leisure facilities and community centres to raise awareness of a consultation.
Surveys and questionnaires	We may ask for responses and feedback using a survey or questionnaire format during the relevant consultation stages.
Utilising our networks	We will share our consultation activity among wider council departments who can promote it further among their existing networks.
Story maps and summary documents	We may produce additional consultation materials such as story maps and summary documents to explain planning policies in plain English.
Online consultation tools	We will explore using new online consultation tools where we see necessary to help widen the reach of our online activity

Meeting our Duty to Co-operate

During the preparation of local plans we must engage with planning authorities and other 'prescribed bodies'. This means working 'constructively and actively on an ongoing basis on strategic issues having an impact on at least two planning areas'.

The prescribed bodies with which the council has a Duty to Co-operate as set out in regulations are as follows:

- The Environment Agency

- Historic England

- Natural England

- The Mayor of London

- The Civil Aviation Authority

- Clinical Commissioning Groups

- The Office of Rail Regulation

- Transport for London and other relevant Highways Authorities

- Neighbouring local authorities

- The Marine Management Organisations

- Local Enterprise Partnership (London Enterprise Partnership)

- Local Nature Partnership

We may agree Statements of Common Ground with stakeholders to set out the position of the council and partners on strategic issues as the local plan progresses through the stages.

How will we consider representations?

Following any consultation or engagement stage, we will analyse and take into consideration any submitted comments or representations. These responses will inform and shape emerging policies and draft documents. Following each formal stage of public consultation, we will publish a consultation statement that sets out:

- A summary of consultation and engagement methods and activities
- The number of representations received
- A summary of the key issues and how they have been taken into account

At certain statutory stages we may publish the representations made in full, when required to do so by the regulations. Where your responses are published online we will ensure that any personal information has been redacted in line with the General Data Protection Regulations.

We can only consider comments that are relevant to the scope of the plan and are related to planning issues. Comments not directly related to the plan in question will be directed to the relevant council department, and will be followed up as appropriate.

Comments received outside of the specified consultation dates will not normally be taken into account. When consultees are struggling to meet the consultation deadline, they should contact the planning policy team to see whether a late submission will be accepted.

Planning applications

To develop land in Westminster or undertake other alterations, such as to display an advert or make alterations to a listed building, you must obtain permission or other relevant consent from the council. The council is responsible for the determination of the vast majority of planning decisions in Westminster, although sometimes planning applications for development of strategic scale are decided by the Mayor of London and, on rare occasions, applications can be called in by the Secretary of State.

There are two main types of planning application – applications for full planning permission and applications for outline planning permission. Applications for full planning permission consider the detailed proposals for a site, whilst an outline planning application relates to the general principles of how a site can be developed.

The council as Local Planning Authority also has responsibility for the determination of a range of related application types including listed building consents, advertisement consents, certificates of lawful development and applications for prior approval. It should be noted that the requirement for consultation on these types of application are typically more limited than for full and outline planning applications.

This chapter will set out how we seek to involve the community throughout the different stages a planning application goes through. It will also set out how we engage with communities on the other types of formal applications, such as those identified above.

The pre-application stage

Community engagement by the developer

National planning policy strongly supports early community engagement and identifies that it has the potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Engaging residents, councillors and other local stakeholders at the earliest possible stage in the scheme development process provides an opportunity for them to have a meaningful role in shaping their places and allows developers to benefit from local knowledge.

Effective, well thought out early engagement can reduce conflict, allow communities to have their say at a stage where their views can genuinely influence design decisions and consequently result in better development that is more responsive to local need and resilient to future changes in local behaviour and demand.

Community engagement undertaken by applicants and developers should occur as early as possible in the scheme development process. It may take a variety of in person and digital forms, such as local exhibitions, public meetings, circulation of leaflets, use of social media or online engagement platforms, or the creation of a well-publicised dedicated website, including a facility to make comments.

Community engagement should be planned across multiple stages and should comprise an inclusive, transparent and open discussion with all parts of the local community. The council published its [Early Community Engagement Guidance](#) for applicants and developers in February 2022. The guidance supports applicants and developers to deliver best practice early community engagement on emerging development proposals. The guidance sets out the council's expectations as to when and how engagement should take place and how this should be reported to the council and other stakeholders.

Well executed early community engagement on development proposals of any scale improves trust and relationships between the applicant and local communities, building greater overall support for development and a greater appreciation of the positive benefits that can be delivered for existing local communities by well-designed development.

Community engagement with the Council

We will participate in an impartial capacity in early community engagement led by applicants and developers on strategic and large-scale development proposals, as identified in our Early Community Engagement guidance.

Local communities are encouraged to communicate their comments on emerging development proposals to the council following pre-application engagement by applicants and developers. Comments can be provided by email using the contact email addresses for the planning area teams provided in Appendix 1. By sharing your comments on emerging development proposals directly with the council, it enables the views of the local community to be addressed in pre-application discussions the council undertakes with applicants and developers, where these are valid planning considerations.

Applicant/developer pre-application discussions with the council

Following initial engagement with the community, we encourage applicants and developers to seek our views on development proposals before they submit an application. While any views we express will not bind the council in it's subsequent decision on any planning application, these pre-application discussions help to identify key issues, and help to ensure that the application closely accords with our planning policies and the aspirations of our communities. Any advice we provide under the service is generally confidential in order to encourage free and frank discussions between applicants and developers on early stage schemes that will likely undergo refinement before the eventual lodging of a planning application, and this also ensures that planners are able to give objective and impartial advice. In the interests of making the planning process as open and transparent as possible, we are committed to publishing any pre-application advice at the subsequent stage when a formal application is submitted, validated and made publicly available. This will apply where a pre-application request was submitted on or after 1 August 2023. The advice will be made available on the application portal on our website where other documents related to planning applications are held. We usually charge a fee for pre-application advice service. More detailed information on pre-application discussions is available on our website.

The planning application stage

This section will set out how the council will notify residents and other community stakeholders so that, where the relevant legislation allows, we are able to facilitate inclusive, transparent and meaningful engagement on planning applications. This allows the council to determine the applications with a full understanding of the views of the local community and other stakeholders.

Once it has been confirmed that an application has all the necessary information in support of it to make it valid, we ensure that we carry out all consultation that we are required to do and allow the necessary time period for comments to be made. We normally allow 21 days, but there may be occasions when a 14 day period is set, for example where we are reconsulting on minor changes to an application we have previously consulted on. Consultation may include:

- Advertising proposals in local newspapers;
- Placing a site notice as near as possible to the application site;
- Advising in writing occupiers of properties immediately adjacent to the application site and directly affected by the proposal;
- Notification via MyWestminster online accounts[2];
- Consultation as required with statutory consultees – such as the Environment Agency, the Health and Safety Executive, the Secretary of State, the Mayor of London and Neighbourhood Forums[3].

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[2] Further advice on how to create a MyWestminster account to receive planning notifications by email can be found here.

[3] Neighbourhood Forums are consulted where they have notified the council of their preference to be consulted on planning applications.

Where appropriate, we also consult others including the following:

- We consult the relevant local amenity society. The city has a network of societies who represent the local community in each area.
- We consult other groups and bodies as appropriate to the nature of the proposal or its location. The relevant groups or bodies are too numerous to list in full here, but include, for example:
  - the Metropolitan Police;
  - Thames Water;
  - Transport for London;
  - neighbouring councils;
  - other residents' and tenants' associations and amenity groups.

We provide details of applications on [our website](). We provide online public access to application documents and drawings once applications are complete and ready to be assessed. We support people to comment on proposals by enabling comments to be submitted online. We will provide those that have commented on an application with email updates on the progress of the application through to its determination.

Considering representations and making a decision

Planning applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan (the London Plan, Westminster's City Plan 2019-2040 and any made Neighbourhood Plans) unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Comments on planning applications should therefore relate to planning issues only - we can't consider non-planning issues.

Examples of issues we consider as planning issues:

- The effect on a neighbour's daylight, sunlight or privacy
- The impact on traffic, road access, parking and servicing
- The appearance, bulk or height of the proposed development
- Impacts like noise generated by the proposal
- The potential loss of a valued local service or use such as a shop or a residential flat

Examples of issues we consider as non-planning issues:

- The effect on property values
- Competition between rival businesses
- Party wall disputes and fire escape matters
- Moral and religious issues

Consultees can only be certain that their views will be taken into account if they meet the deadline we set for response to consultation. However, in practice, further time may be available before the decision is made. If you are having difficulty meeting the prescribed deadline, you should contact the case officer to see whether a late comment will be accepted. Statutory consultees may be allowed a longer period of time to comment on applications where this is prescribed by legislation.

Following the end of a consultation period we will consider all comments received on an application. Any issues raised will be discussed and addressed as part of the planning officers report on the application.

Most planning applications are determined by planning officers under delegated powers. Contentious or sensitive planning applications are determined by one of our four Planning Applications Sub-Committees, which are held in public.

Anyone is welcome to attend the Planning Applications Sub-Committee meetings in person or online to listen to the debate. Those who have registered to speak in advance of the sub-committee meeting may also make verbal representations to the sub-committee in person or remotely. Reports on applications being considered by the sub-committees are published on our website, usually 5 working days before the sub-committee meeting.

Applications called in by the Mayor or Secretary of State

The Mayor of London and the Secretary of State have the power to call in applications rather than letting the local authority decide, which may happen on issues of London or national importance.

Where applications are called in by the Mayor or Secretary of State, we will usually continue to be responsible for consultation and providing the responses to those taking the decisions.

Once an application is called in by the Mayor a 'representation hearing' is held. More detail is provided on the Mayor's website.

When an application is called in by the Secretary of State (SoS) an inquiry will be undertaken by the Planning Inspectorate, after which the Secretaty of State will make a decision. Further information on called in applications by the Secretary of State is provided by the Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Housing.

The appeal stage

Applicants may appeal against the council's decision where they do not agree with the reasons we give for refusing permission, where they do not agree with the conditions we have imposed if an application is believed to be refused against the development plan or planning policy, to object to conditions, or where the decision has not been made within the specified timeframe.

When we are notified of an appeal by the Planning Inspectorate, we notify interested parties of the appeal and provide a copy of comments made on an application to the Inspectorate. Interested parties are advised of how they can be involved in the appeal process.

If an appeal is to be considered at an informal hearing or public inquiry, we also notify interested parties of the venue and time of the hearing (including options for remote attendance or participation where this is made available) in line with the Planning Inspectorate's requirements. Further information on planning appeals is provided by the Department for Levelling Up, Communities and Housing.

Other types of applications

We carry out consultations on other types of applications besides planning applications in accordance with statutory requirements. Consultations are undertaken according to the principles set out in the following sections.

Listed building consent

Listed building consent is required for any works to a listed building that would affect its special architectural or historic interest.

Consultation on listed building consent applications varies based on the grade of listing:

- They are advertised in the local newspaper and by site notice, except where the works are only internal and where the building is listed Grade II.
- Where partial or total demolition is involved, we consult the National Amenity Societies.
- We consult Historic England in accordance with government guidance.
- Other consultation is carried out as appropriate for the individual application – e.g. with the relevant local amenity society and/or neighbourhood forum.

Certificate of lawfulness

A Certificate of lawfulness clarifies that an existing or proposed use or development is lawful and therefore does not require planning permission.

Decisions on these applications are a matter of law, not of planning policy, so there is no requirement to consult on them. We may, however, consult adjacent occupiers and local amenity societies and/or neighbourhood forums on applications relating to existing use or development to establish whether the evidence provided by the applicant in support of their application is accurate.

Advertisement consent

The advertisement control system covers a wide range of adverts and signs including shop signs and estate agents' boards, and adverts on hoardings and flags.

We consult as required by the relevant regulations[4], depending on what land is likely to be affected. This could in relevant cases be with the Secretary of State for Transport, neighbouring boroughs, and bodies responsible for railways and waterways. In dealing with advertisement consent applications, the council can only assess visual amenity and highway safety issues.

Trees

Almost any work to a protected tree covered by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) needs consent from the council. Any works to a tree in a conservation area requires to give at least six weeks' notice to the council in order to consider if a TPO should be made in respect of the tree(s).

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[4] The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 2007 (as amended)

For these trees, we usually consult those neighbours we consider might be directly affected by proposed tree removal, although there is no statutory requirement to do so. However, we do not normally consult neighbours about proposed tree surgery (e.g. pruning).

Prior Approval

Certain types of work are permitted development and are granted permission by national legislation without the need to submit a planning application. In some cases, the person wishing to carry out the permitted development must still submit either a prior approval or prior notification application to the council before the work takes place to confirm that the proposal conforms to the criteria set out in the national legislation and/or to ensure the council does not object on the limited grounds for objection that are available to it in some cases.

The level of consultation will vary depending on which prior approval regime the application has been submitted pursuant to, in line with the regulations[5]. Consultation under the procedure for larger home extensions may be limited to serving notice on adjoining owners or occupiers immediately adjoining the site. Notification on applications submitted pursuant to more complex prior approval regimes, such as for Class E to residential change of use, may also include notification of the local amenity society and/or neighbourhood forum, as well as relevant statutory consultees.

Permission in principle

Permission in principle is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development. It separates the consideration of matters of principle for the proposed development from the technical detail of the development.

The relevant regulations[6] require applications to be publicised online on the council's website and by placement of a site notice as near as possible to the application site. We will provide details of permission in principle applications in the same way as for planning applications.

Non-Material Amendments

Following the grant of a planning permission it is possible to make small changes to the proposal.

As by definition the changes sought as part of a non-material amendment application[7] will be non-material. The council will not normally undertake consultation or publicity for these applications.

Approval of details

Conditions are often imposed on the grant of a planning permission or listed building consent which require the submission of further details such as materials or detailed drawings. These are also known as approval of details.

The council will not normally give notification of approval of details applications, except where in granting conditional permission a Planning Applications Sub-

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[5] The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development)(England) Order 2015 (as amended)
[6] The Town and Country Planning (Permission in Principle) (Amendment) Order 2017
[7] Pursuant to to S96A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)

Committee has specifically directed that a particular interested party or parties should be notified and/or it is necessary to consult a statutory consultee. In such cases, the intention to give notification when details are submitted pursuant to a condition will normally be indicated in the reason for the condition or via an informative attached to the decision letter.

Appendices

1. Key contact details

Email alerts:
- Sign up to our Planning Policy Consultation database. This database receives notifications on new planning policy document consultations: Planning consultation database
- Sign up to MyWestminster to set up email notifications for future planning applications within an area/areas of Westminster that you are interested in: Set up automatic email notifications for planning applications

Webpages:
- Latest information on Westminster's planning policy framework at this link: Planning policy
- Current consultations at the council (Including non-planning consultations): Consultations
- Current Planning Policy consultations: Current and recent consultations
- Planning application advice: Request Pre-Application Advice
- Neighbourhood Planning advice (See Neighbourhood Planning section for more information): About Neighbourhood Planning
- Current planning and other related applications: Search and comment on planning applications

Contact by email:
- Planning policy can be contacted at planningpolicy@westminster.gov.uk
- For Neighbourhood Planning please contact neighbourhoodplanning@westminster.gov.uk
- Planning enforcement can be contacted at planningenforcementteam@westminster.gov.uk
- Central area planning team (W1 postcode) can be contacted at centralplanningteam@westminster.gov.uk
- North area planning team (NW1, NW6, NW8, W2, W9, W10 and W11 postcodes) can be contacted at northplanningteam@westminster.gov.uk
- South area planning team (SW1, SW7, WC2 and EC4 postcodes) can be contacted at southplanningteam@westminster.gov.uk
- Building Control can be contacted at districtsurveyors@westminster.gov.uk
- Section 106 team can be contacted at s106@westminster.gov.uk
- Community Infrastructure Levy team can be contacted at cil@westminster.gov.uk

Social media:
Follow WCC on Twitter: @CityWestminster
Subscribe on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/c/WestminsterCityCouncil

Find us on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/CityWestminster
Follow us on Instagram: @CityWestminster

The Westminster Reporter Newsletter:
https://www.westminster.gov.uk/reporter
Other newsletters from the Council:
https://www.westminster.gov.uk/newsletters

2. Key Partnerships

Partner	Stakeholders involved
Central Government	Various government departments such as Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities
Mayor of London	The GLA family including Transport for London
Cross-borough working	Neighbouring Local Authorities: • Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea • London Borough of Brent • London Borough of Camden • City of London Corporation • London Borough of Lambeth • London Borough of Wandsworth
Business Improvement Districts	Local business groups
Westminster Amenity Societies	• Bayswater Residents Association • Belgravia Residents Association • Belgravia Society • Covent Garden Community Association • Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association • Hyde Park Estate Association • Knightsbridge Association • Marylebone Association • North Paddington Society • Paddington Waterways and Maida Vale Society • Pimlico F.R.E.D.A • Residents Society of Mayfair and St James • St Johns Wood Society • St Marylebone Society • Soho Society • South Easy Bayswater Residents Association • Thorney Island Society and Friends of St James Park and Green Park • Westminster Society

	• Westminster Amenity Society Forum
Westminster Neighbourhood Forums	• Queens Park Parish Council • Maida Hill Neighbourhood Forum • Westbourne Neighbourhood Forum • Belgravia Neighbourhood Forum • Church Street Neighbourhood Forum • Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Forum • Hyde Park and Paddington Neighbourhood Forum • Notting Hill East Neighbourhood Forum • Marylebone Neighbourhood Forum • Pimlico Neighbourhood Forum • St Johns Wood Neighbourhood Forum • Soho Neighbourhood Forum • Victoria Neighbourhood Forum • Mayfair Neighbourhood Forum • Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Forum • Westminster Forum of Forums
Statutory consultees	• The Environment Agency • Historic England • Natural England • The Mayor of London • The Civil Aviation Authority • Clinical Commissioning Groups • Network Rail • Transport for London and other relevant Highways Authorities • The Marine Management Organisation • Port of London Authority • Local Enterprise Partnership (London Enterprise Partnership) • Local Nature Partnership (All London Green Grid Local Nature Partnership) • Royal Parks • London Historic Parks and Gardens Trust • Sports England • Thames Water • National grid • Met police • Health and Safety Executive – Planning Gateway One applications
Other partners	• WPA • Westminster Health and Wellbeing board

3. Process Route map

Our process route map sets out the key considerations when planning and conducting a consultation. This will be used by officers as a checklist to ensure that the principles of engagement are met, and our engagement activities are carried out effectively and consistently. This will help us to hold ourselves accountable to carrying out consultations effectively.

Good practice checklist

When designing a consultation/ engagement session	What do we want to achieve? What feedback are we hoping to get?
	Are we avoiding duplication of similar research or evidence we already have?
	Who are the key stakeholders? Who needs to be informed and involved?
	What tools and techniques are best suited? What works best for each stakeholder?
	What is the timescale? Is the timescale realistic?
	Are we being inclusive?
	How do we reach all those who are interested?
	How can we reach the 'seldom heard' and hard to reach groups?
	What innovative tools could we use?
	Is it accessible for non 'tech savvy' people?
	Have we avoided planning jargon where possible?
	Have we selected the right consultation methods?
	Are the proposed methods proportionate to the scope of the consultation?
	What are the resource implications and how can we best manage this?
Before starting a consultation/ engagement	Is the consultation visible?
	Are we promoting the activity wide enough?
	Is the timeframe reasonable for individuals to make a meaningful response?
	Are the materials accessible to everyone?

	Are the materials clear and easy to understand?
	Are the documents concise and not unnecessarily long?
	Where technical planning language is unavoidable, have we clearly explained its meaning?
	Has the purpose of the consultation been clearly explained?
	Is it clear how people can provide comments and how these will be used?
	Is the consultation tailored to the relevant communities?
	Are the documents easy to understand and in plain language?
	Is it necessary to provide other languages?
	Have we ensured we are capturing all the contact information of those who participate in the consultation?
After consultation/ engagement	How can we explain clearly how comments were taken into account?
	Have we shared relevant feedback with other teams/departments (if applicable)?
	Have we clearly communicated the decisions taken?
	Have we clearly set out the next steps?
	Have we identified where and when the results will be reported?
	What platforms will be used to publish the results of the engagement?
	Is enough feedback being given to participants and in a timely way?
Reflection and learnings	What has gone well/not so well?
	What are key learnings to apply to future engagement exercises?