



## Environment Policy and Scrutiny Committee Briefing

**Date:** Monday 13<sup>th</sup> April 2015

**Briefing of:** Cllr Robert Davis DL, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for the Built Environment

**Please contact:** Matt Greet ext. 2852  
[mgreet@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:mgreet@westminster.gov.uk)

### 1. Neighbourhood Planning

1.1 Neighbourhood Planning is a substantive item on the Committee's agenda for 13<sup>th</sup> April.

#### 1.2 Designated Neighbourhood Forums

- The Mayfair Neighbourhood Forum was designated in January 2014. Officers have been working with the forum and have provided statistical information to help inform the further development of their neighbourhood plan.
- The Soho Neighbourhood Forum was designated in July 2014. They are in the process of organising a further community meeting to help increase awareness and the implications of neighbourhood planning.
- The Church Street Ward Neighbourhood Forum was designated in August 2014. An officer met the newly elected chairman on the 5<sup>th</sup> March in order to discuss neighbourhood planning in more detail.
- The Belgravia Neighbourhood Forum was designated in October 2014. Officers are currently assisting the Forum in communicating the role of the forum to the local residents.
- The Notting Hill East Neighbourhood Forum was designated in October 2014. The forum is in the process of setting up operation as a dual amenity society and neighbourhood forum.
- The St. James's Neighbourhood Forum was formally designated on 5<sup>th</sup> February this year. An officer met members of the Forum on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March to discuss next steps, including funding. An officer is met the potential forum chairman on 26<sup>th</sup> March in order to discuss neighbourhood planning in more detail.

- The Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Forum was formally designated on 5<sup>th</sup> February.

### 1.3 Neighbourhood Forum Applications

- 1.4 The Cabinet Member Report designating the Pimlico Neighbourhood Forum is currently being revised to strengthen its constitution and I will be signing it off shortly.
- 1.5 Officers are currently assessing responses received to the recently closed consultations on the Marylebone Neighbourhood Forum and the Victoria Neighbourhood Forum. Both received generally strong support from the local area.
- 1.6 The consultations on the Maida Hill Neighbourhood Forum and the Churchill Gardens Neighbourhood Forum started on 25<sup>th</sup> February and will continue until 10<sup>th</sup> April. Consultation on the proposed Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Forum began on 1<sup>st</sup> April and will continue until 15<sup>th</sup> May.

## 2. Westminster's City Plan

- 2.1 Since my last report to the Committee, I have subsequently made a series of announcements regarding the fast-tracking of certain elements of the City Plan. This has been undertaken to tackle several key issues currently affecting Westminster, which would worsen if the policies aimed at addressing them were implemented on the original timeline.
- 2.2 Last month, I signed a Cabinet Member Report which codified this acceleration of a series of policies. Chief amongst these are the Basement development, Mixed Use & Office to Residential Conversion and Special Policy Areas revisions.
- 2.3 Our new framework to manage the impact of basement development in Westminster will be sped up through the normally lengthy stages of Examination in Public and formal consultation. This will allow it to be put in place this calendar year.
- 2.4 From 1<sup>st</sup> September this year, I will also implement our new approach to office to residential conversion in the city, determining applications under the national priority of presumption in favour of sustainable development. From that date, no office losses will be acceptable, except where a developer can demonstrate that the benefits of the proposal taken as a whole outweigh the loss of the office floorspace. Given the importance of Westminster's office stock, this will be rare.

The City Council's current Mixed Use policy is predicated on the market not bringing forward enough housing provision. This clearly does not apply to the current environment given the clamour to turn offices into residential accommodation. Therefore, as part of the City Council's new approach, our current mixed use policy will be applied much more flexibly to allow exceptions to the requirement to provide commensurate residential floorspace. This will include other commercial uses being provided in lieu of the housing.

- 2.5 Further to the designation of two new Special Policy Areas (SPAs) for Savile Row and St James's in 2011, it has become clear that additional measures are required in Mayfair. A new proposed SPA for Mayfair, focusing on the art galleries around Cork Street, was set out as part of our City Plan consultation. There have already been a number of high profile planning applications in the area over the past 24 months and a detailed policy framework is needed to offer certainty. Therefore this revision will also be fast-tracked.

### **3. Development of a Westminster Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)**

- 3.1 The next step in the formal process is to approve the documentation for a draft CIL charging schedule. It is proposed consultation will begin this month.
- 3.2 An Interim Guidance Note setting out the process and procedure for dealing with the transitional period between 6<sup>th</sup> April and our own CIL is adopted will be published shortly.

### **4. Crossrail**

#### **Crossrail Line 1**

- 4.1 The revised planning application for over-site development at Bond Street East Ticket Hall (Hanover Square) from the Great Portland Estate was approved on 17<sup>th</sup> March by the Planning Applications Committee which I chair. The development will bring forward office accommodation alongside residential and retail space, together with associated public realm improvements. The design of the building has improved markedly since the early proposals were submitted, including additional restaurant and shopping accommodation.
- 4.2 The Great Portland Estate have also commissioned the public realm consultancy Publica to develop a public realm strategy for Hanover Square Gardens and the surrounding area, as part of longer term improvements to the Gardens. My officers are working closely with Publica to develop these proposals.

#### **Crossrail Line 2**

- 4.3 Officers responded to the Department for Transport on the Crossrail 2 revised safeguarding directions on 29<sup>th</sup> January. Whilst this set out the City Council's support for the proposed stations at Tottenham Court Road and Victoria, clear opposition was stated to the proposed use of some public open spaces for works.
- 4.4 TfL held a briefing for community and business leaders on 11<sup>th</sup> March to discuss the Crossrail 2 safeguarding and its potential impact on the Soho area. Following initial responses to the recently closed consultation exercise, TfL are now formally asking the DfT to remove the draft designation of Soho Square Gardens as an Area of Surface Interest. TfL also intend to arrange further briefings between now and the next formal stage in autumn 2015.

## **5. Victoria Area Schemes**

- 5.1 London Underground's Victoria Station Upgrade (VSU) works are progressing as planned, with the new northern ticket hall due to open in 2016, alongside Phase 1 of Land Securities' mixed use Nova scheme.
- 5.2 TfL are reviewing options for the relocation of Victoria Coach Station (VCS) to make way for Crossrail Line 2 works to the Departures Hall Site in the early 2020s and for the removal of some buses from the front of the mainline station at Victoria.
- 5.3 Whilst Network Rail continue to develop their Masterplan for improvements within the Station, their bridge strengthening works to Ebury, Elizabeth and Eccleston Bridges are due to start in June this year.
- 5.4 Together these works will allow for further consideration to be given to the future of the Inner Ring Road around and through Victoria to improve traffic flows and enhance the pedestrian experience.

## **6. Victoria – Nine Elms Bridge**

- 6.1 Following the Bridge Design Competition organised by the London Borough of Wandsworth, a shortlist of four design teams was announced on 17<sup>th</sup> March.
- 6.2 Stage 2 of the competition is due to begin on 11<sup>th</sup> May and at this stage Wandsworth will announce their preferred landing site. Although this process is scheduled to be finalised in September with a winning design team announced, this is still not a live development project and there is no commitment in place from Wandsworth, TfL or others that the bridge will actually be built.
- 6.3 Officers continue to reiterate the City Council's strong objections to the proposals. We continue to receive letters of objection to the bridge, including from the Westminster Boating Base, local residents and Churchill and Tachbrook Ward Councillors.

## **7. Proposals for Introducing a Two-Way Operation to Baker Street**

7.1 On 19<sup>th</sup> March I signed the updated report which outlined my position as the Cabinet Member with responsibility for the proposed project to bring forward two-way operation on Baker Street and Gloucester Place to Oxford Street. This report also set out that the public consultation would commence in May.

7.2 The principal aim of the project is to tackle the current dominance of traffic in the area, whilst providing further benefits to make the area safer, more accessible and more welcoming for residents and visitors. Currently, the area suffers from:

- High speed traffic arising from the original 1960s gyratory system
- Congestion and pinch points at road junctions and footways
- Lack of pedestrian crossings
- Tired streetscape and ageing infrastructure
- Lack of safe cycling facilities and poor accessibility for buses

The project would deliver:

- Significant highway improvements
- Upgrades to over 50 signal crossings and 20 new pedestrian crossings
- Wider, less cluttered pavements on Baker Street and Dorset Square
- Better pedestrian signage
- Removal of unnecessary, out-of-date street furniture
- Brand new street lighting for the area
- More accessible and easy to understand bus routes with better located, less congested bus stops
- Extra places for cyclists to park their bicycles, new cycle lanes and advanced cycle stoplines at signals to make the area easier and safer to cycle through

7.3 One part of the project is to look at options for improving the right-turning capacity for southbound traffic on the Marylebone Road. As part of the updated report, I formalised my decision to discount two of the draft options previously put forward that took traffic through Dorset Square. The public consultation will include two options for this right turn, one through improving the Rossmore Road junction and the other through a right turn at Allsop Place, alongside improvements to the Rossmore Road junction.

## **8. Development Planning**

### **Basement developments**

- 8.1 In addition to the fast-tracking of the City Council's full basement development policy, I also instructed that officers undertake the necessary work to publish a new piece of policy called a non-immediate Article 4 Direction. Without a direction of this kind, currently any proposed basement development which falls within the footprint of the dwelling does not require planning permission from the City Council. The Article 4 direction will remove this permitted development right.

This will come into effect one year after its publication and will sit beside our new overarching policy, as a further tool at our disposal for the appropriate management of basement development in the city.

### **Office to residential conversions**

- 8.2 Following amendments to government policy, changes of a buildings use from office to residential can currently be undertaken anywhere outside the Central Activities Zone without needing planning permission from the City Council. This removed our ability as a planning authority to oversee and manage such schemes. The government changes were originally intended as a temporary amendment to permitted development rights, which would end in May 2016. However, last year they outlined their intention to make the mechanism permanent.

I am delighted that, thanks to our concerted effort to oppose the measure on the basis of the resulting huge losses in commercial space, last week the government announced that they will revert back to the original position next year. This means that from May 2016 all office to residential conversions will require planning permission from the City Council.

### **Vacant building credit**

- 8.3 Following a series of meetings with the Department for Communities and Local Government, additional guidance has been issued with respect to the Vacant Building Credit. Crucially, this includes a clearer steer over the definition of a vacant building. The guidance advises that local planning authorities should 'have regard to the intention of national policy' and has introduced two new key considerations:

- Whether the building has been made vacant for the sole purpose of redevelopment.
- Whether the building is covered by an extant or recently expired planning permission for the same or substantially the same development.

The vast majority of applications in Westminster will be covered by these caveats and as such will not qualify for the discount in affordable housing contributions. Whilst the implications of the discount became clear at our Planning Applications Committees, we purposefully held back from issuing decision notices in the anticipation that our lobbying would be successfully.

The City Council has therefore not lost any affordable housing payments. Officers are in the process of going back to developers and advising them their schemes no longer benefit from the credit.

Whilst we can use this new guidance for making decisions now, to ensure the negative effects that very nearly became a reality definitely cannot come to fruition, the City Council's interpretation of the Vacant Building Credit will be included in the fast-tracking of elements of our City Plan.

### **Assets of Community Value**

8.4 On 6<sup>th</sup> April, if public house designated as an asset of community value, developers will not be able to change its use as they are currently able to under permitted development rights. This means that any scheme proposing to change a public house to retail or any other use will be required to submit a planning application to the City Council, allowing us to properly assess the impact of any such development.

Furthermore, if a public house is designated as an asset of community value, that can now be assessed as a material consideration in determining a planning application.

### **Betting Shops**

8.5 From the 15<sup>th</sup> April, Betting Shops will be classed as a sui generis use. As such, this will stop units currently occupied by retail, banking or other frontages being changed to betting shops under permitted development rights. Any such change will require submission of a full planning application to the City Council, allowing a Committee to consider the effect of such a change in the local area.