



Environment Policy and Scrutiny Committee Briefing

Date: Monday 22nd June 2015

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

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1. Neighbourhood Planning

Designated Neighbourhood Forums

- 1.1 The Mayfair Neighbourhood Forum was designated in January 2014. The forum is holding a series of consultation events during June and July in order to seek views on the proposed plan objectives. These relate to housing, local retail, amenities, public space, traffic and architecture.
- 1.2 The Soho Neighbourhood Forum was designated in July 2014. They held a further community meeting on 10th June to help increase awareness and the implications of neighbourhood planning.
- 1.3 The Westbourne Neighbourhood Forum was designated in July 2014. They have begun work on their neighbourhood plan with our officers.
- 1.4 The Church Street Ward Neighbourhood Forum was designated in August 2014. The forum is looking to hold their inaugural community meeting and raise awareness at a number of community events over the next few months. The forum has successfully received their £8,000 grant from the Government (Locality).
- 1.5 The Belgravia Neighbourhood Forum was designated in October 2014. Officers are assisting the Forum in communicating the role of the forum to the local residents.
- 1.6 The Notting Hill East Neighbourhood Forum was designated in October 2014. The key issues that the forum is currently interested in are public realm, housing unit sizes and community cohesion.
- 1.7 The St. James's Neighbourhood Forum was formally designated on 5th February this year. The forum held an initial steering group meeting on 2nd June with a City Council officer providing support.
- 1.8 The Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Forum was formally designated on 5th February. The key issues the forum will be looking into include affordable housing, development pressures, independent businesses, public realm, transport, greening, and night time activity. The forum have organised separate working groups to assess these issues.

Neighbourhood Forum Applications

- 1.9 The Cabinet Member Report designating the Pimlico Neighbourhood Forum is currently being revised following advice from officers on its constitution.
- 1.10 Following the completion of consultation on the Marylebone Neighbourhood Forum, officers are currently examining their draft constitution before submitting for my approval. The Victoria Neighbourhood Forum is in the process of setting out their timetable of forum meetings and will be designated in due course.
- 1.11 The consultation on the Maida Hill Neighbourhood Forum closed on 10th April and received a largely positive response. Consultation on the proposed Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Forum closed on 15th May, with no objections or issues raised by

the local community. Both Cabinet Member Reports to designate the forums are currently in draft for my approval.

- 1.12 The consultation on Churchill Gardens Neighbourhood Forum also completed on 10th April. Due to the low number of responses received, an additional three week period for representations was undertaken up until 12th June. Offices are currently collating these additional responses.

2. Westminster's City Plan

- 2.1 In my last report to the Committee, I outlined the set of revisions to the City Plan which will be fast-tracked in order to tackle several key issues currently affecting Westminster. Chief amongst these are policy changes to the City Council's approach to Basement development, Mixed Use & Office to Residential Conversion and Special Policy Areas.
- 2.2 A combined report covering the revisions to basements and mixed use policies is currently being formulated and I have given informal feedback on an early draft.
- 2.3 In addition to the fast-tracking of the basements policy, at the end of March 2015 I requested 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. The drafting and implementation of the direction will take this length of time in order to ensure it goes through the proper process of examination and review. Were a direction implemented straight away, the financial cost to the City Council in lost applicant appeals would be very high.

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

- 3.1 On 4th June I approved the publication of Westminster's Draft CIL Charging Schedule for public consultation. This second formal consultation stage in the process for setting a local CIL began on 12th June.
- 3.2 A full set of Westminster CIL documentation has been published on the City Council's website, including the evidence on which it is based, and I invite all Councillors to make their representations by 6pm on 24th July when the consultation closes.

4. Crossrail

Crossrail Line 1

- 4.1 A decision is imminent on the application to reinstate the London Underground worksite at Marylebone Lane to provide improved public realm adjacent to the new entrance to Bond Street Underground Station. This will include hard and soft landscaping and provision for the ventilation for a sub-surface substation. The upgrade of Bond Street Station is being undertaken in conjunction with the Crossrail works and will provide access to and interchange with Crossrail when it opens in December 2018.
- 4.2 Applications for Crossrail public realm reinstatement works at Bond Street and Tottenham Court Road stations are expected this summer.
- 4.3 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 and the work is on-going.

Crossrail Line 2

- 4.4 The revised Crossrail Line 2 Safeguarding Directions were issued on 24th May 2015 with immediate effect. Many of the City Council's concerns have been met, specifically the removal of Soho Square Gardens as an Area of Surface Interest. The revised safeguarding now includes the roads around the Square but not the Gardens.
- 4.5 TfL are developing the route within the updated safeguarded boundaries, as well as the branch lines at either end of the Crossrail 2 route, in readiness for a further round of public consultation this autumn. The next round of consultation will provide more detail on the scheme and stations, reflecting the concerns expressed during the safeguarding consultation.
- 4.6 Officers will work closely with TfL in developing the proposals in Westminster, a series of meetings have been planned with TfL in the lead up to the autumn consultation and the first of these meetings took place on 4th June.
- 4.7 TfL are keen to provide key stakeholders with an opportunity to share their views and identify key local issues prior to the next formal consultation in the autumn. TfL are working with the City Council to set up two Crossrail 2 Community Working Groups in Victoria and Tottenham Court Road. The groups will be separate from the Crossrail 1 Community Liaison Panels. A briefing for Members on Crossrail 2 is also being held on 8th July at 6pm, prior to the Full Council Meeting.

5. Victoria Area Schemes

- 5.1 London Underground's Victoria Station Upgrade 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 to make way for Crossrail Line 2 works to the departures hall site in the early 2020s. TfL are also examining options 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 this month.
- 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 17th March.
- 6.2 Stage 2 of the competition began on 11th May and at its completion 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.

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

- 7.1 The public consultation on the proposed project to reintroduce two way traffic operation on Baker Street and Gloucester Place began on 26th May. It will last for ten weeks, closing on 31st July. A public exhibition was held on 10th, 11th and 13th at St Cyprian's Church.
- 7.2 A second exhibition will take place from 4pm-7pm on Thursday 2nd July and 12pm-4pm on Saturday 4th July at the Park Plaza Sherlock Holmes at 108 Baker Street.

7.3 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
- Convoluted and circuitous travel routes
- 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
- 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
- More trees and greenery where possible.

7.4 Following the conclusion of the public consultation, the collated responses will be considered carefully as the project is reviewed in its entirety. This analysis will take place before any decisions are taken.

8. Development Planning

Short term lets

8.1 The new regulations regarding short term lettings will come into force imminently. The change to the law now means that property owners in London no longer need to contact their local council before letting out their properties on a short-term basis. The law has retained a cumulative 90-day limit for short-term letting and allows local authorities to apply to the Secretary of State to exempt specific properties or areas from the right to short-term let, if longer-term problems are experienced.

8.2 Members of the Committee will be well aware that in Westminster we pressed the government very hard to reverse their position. A large number of people let out their homes, or rooms in their homes, on a short-term basis in London without any problems at all and we would never seek to take enforcement action to prevent them from doing so. However, where problem short-term letting occurs, it brings with it a range of issues such as anti-social behaviour. The practice also impacts negatively on the availability of housing stock in central London, with more than 7,300 properties lost to commercial short-term letting over the past 15 years in Westminster alone.

- 8.3 The team will continue to monitor what we fear will be a negative impact, which if borne out we will put back to government in the strongest possible terms.

Office to residential conversions – permitted development rights

- 8.4 In April the government's announced that legislation regarding carrying out office to residential conversions under permitted development rights 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.
- 8.5 Discussions with the new civil service team at the Department for Communities and Local Government on the firm date for this reversion are continuing, but we are still working on the basis that it will be May 2016 as originally intended.

Planning Team transformation project

- 8.6 The Planning Team is currently undergoing a major transformation project designed to improve ways of working.
- 8.7 As a result our planning enforcement team have now completely converted to digital platforms, allowing them to store and access an enormous amount of files and information on the go. We are also currently engaging with Amenity Societies through various stakeholder sessions to talk through how best to reduce the current burden on the City Council of producing a wealth of paper plans and reports.