

**Date:** Monday 16 September 2019

**Portfolio:** Cabinet Member for Place Shaping and Planning

**Author:** Councillor Richard Beddoe

**Contact:** Charlie Hawken [chawken@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:chawken@westminster.gov.uk)

## **1. The City Plan**

- 1.1 Our draft City Plan contains numerous new proposed planning policies which I outlined at the previous Committee. Formal consultation (known as Regulation 19) on the City Plan took place 17<sup>th</sup> June – 31<sup>st</sup> July 2019, following an informal consultation at the end of last year. The new draft Plan is the result of a complete review of the adopted City Plan (2016) and saved Unitary Development Plan policies (2007). It will create a single, up to date local plan to manage development in Westminster. It also revisits the strategic direction of Westminster's planning policies and ensures the City Plan is aligned with City for All objectives and is fit for purpose into the next decades.
- 1.2 The consultation attracted 160 responses, with over 2,000 individual comments. The scale and ambition of the plan received positive comments from a range of stakeholders.
- 1.3 Officers are currently reviewing all of the comments and determining what action is necessary as a result of the feedback we have received. Any necessary modifications will then be made to the plan before it is submitted to the Secretary of State for examination. An independent Planning Inspector will then publicly examine the plan and its supporting evidence to determine if it is sound. Assuming the plan is found to be sound, we will adopt the new City Plan in 2020.

## **2. Oxford Street District**

- 2.1 Significant progress has been made towards delivery of the Oxford Street District Place Strategy and Delivery Plan since the last update in June.
- 2.2 Phase One works to address immediate maintenance needs and improve safety have progressed well and are on track for completion ahead of schedule in early 2020. Design work has progressed on priority work

packages which will be delivered Spring 2020 once the new design and build contractor is in place.

- 2.3 Procurement of professional resources and a design and build contractor is on track with contract awards expected in September. Professional resources being sourced include a Project Director to oversee the planning and delivery of the complex programme.
- 2.4 Work to plan and model how traffic will operate across the district is well underway with modelling results and decisions on concept designs due later in September. Work is also underway to model the air quality impacts of the proposed traffic changes and to develop district-specific action plans for air quality and freight and servicing.
- 2.5 The second round of Zonal Working Groups, involving representatives of resident and business stakeholders, were held in July. Topics covered future management and enforcement and street design principles. These meetings were well received by stakeholders and provided useful feedback to the project team. Results of traffic modelling will be presented to stakeholders at the next Zonal Working Group meetings in October.
- 2.6 Work has begun to upgrade the programme website and improve communications to ensure residents and businesses are well informed as the programme moves to delivery.

### **3. Planning Review**

- 3.1 Since the last update the project team have developed an implementation programme for the review of the planning service in light of the PAS report findings that were reported to Cabinet in October 2018. The review of the service has been split into two main themes, 'Process Review' and 'Service Transformation'. The Process Review theme focuses on amendments and enhancements that can be made to fees and charges for pre-application advice and the form of the pre-application services that can be provided, as well as looking at how delegated authority could be delegated down to more junior officers to enable them to take more ownership of their decisions and deliver efficiencies to the operation of the service itself. The Service Transformation theme focuses on enhancements that can be made to develop the delivery service and enhance its transparency. This includes developing a shared vision and core values for Place Shaping and Town Planning, introducing public speaking and live streaming at planning committee meetings and development of working relationships with key internal and external stakeholders.
- 3.2 The review of the pre-application service and pre-application service charges is at an advanced stage in terms of developing a preferred option for a new pre-application service which includes the introduction of a Design Review Panel and a Development Management Panel (which will facilitate discussion of pre-application schemes between developers, Ward Councillors and residents) for major developments to enhance the advice provided to developers proposing major scale development at the earliest stage of

engagement. The potential to introduce a choice of service levels for Householder, Minor and Medium scale development is also being explored.

- 3.3 Work on a review of how delegated powers are used by officers has been scoped by the project team and work is now underway to develop options that can be considered for how this change to the current departmental processes can be implemented to streamline the decision making process and empower officers to take ownership of their own work, whilst maintaining appropriate checks and balances to retain the current quality and consistency of decision making.
- 3.4 The project team expect to be in a position to develop their preferred options for changes to the pre-application process and how delegated authority is exercised by October 2019, with the implementation of the preferred options by early to mid 2020. In the short term recommendations are expected from the Commercial Opportunities Board (COB) chaired by Cllr Robathan in September in terms of whether current pre-application charges are sufficient to cover the cost of providing the pre-application service. If COB recommends increases in pre-application fees, these can be introduced in the final quarter of 2019 prior to more comprehensive changes to the design of the pre-application advice service in 2020.
- 3.5 Under the 'Service Transformation' theme, public speaking was successfully introduced in February 2019 and a review of the performance of this process will be reported to the Planning and City Development Committee in October 2019. The additional provision of live streaming of planning committee meetings will be introduced from the Planning (Major) Applications Sub-Committee meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> September onwards. This will allow planning committee meetings to be viewed live online at the time of the committee meeting or for the meeting to be viewed subsequently via the Council's website, significantly enhancing the accessibility and transparency of decision making on strategic scale and contentious planning applications.
- 3.6 A joint vision and core values has been developed by officers for the new Place Shaping and Town Planning department. This brings together its shared aims and objectives and establishes shared values for all officers, enhancing working relationships within the new department. The vision is also consistent with the wider vision for Growth, Planning and Housing and with City for All.
- 3.7 Work has begun to develop a strategy to ensure Place Shaping and Town Planning operates collaboratively with wider key internal and external stakeholders, to address the perception identified in the PAS findings that planning decisions were sometimes made without sufficient regard to the Council's wider corporate objectives. Work on this strategy is at an early stage and further progress will be reported in subsequent briefings on the Planning Review Programme.
- 3.8 The WCC Guidance for Members Making Planning Decisions (2018 version) has been updated following the recommendation of the Standards Committee in mid-July and the document now provides Members with a robust and clear guide to procedures to be followed to ensure planning decisions are made in a

way which is fair and transparent. The updated guidance will be circulated to Members serving on Planning Applications Sub-Committees shortly.

#### **4. Community Infrastructure Levy**

- 4.1 As of 31<sup>st</sup> July 2019, the Council has collected £56.629m of CIL since the Charging Schedule came into effect in May 2016. This represents a further £8.868m collected since my last report.
- 4.2 Cabinet CIL Committee met on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019 and agreed to allocate £5.697m to a range of infrastructure projects under the council's 'strategic' portion of CIL, put forward by the various service areas of the council. These included further investment in electric charging infrastructure, the refurbishment of the historic Porchester Spa, public realm improvements to Manchester Square, finalising the improvements to the St. Mary Magdalene community centre, and further improvements to pedestrian safety around the city. To date, the council has allocated £22.879m of this portion of its CIL funds to infrastructure projects.
- 4.3 The next Cabinet CIL Committee will meet on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2019 and will also consider applications for the 'neighbourhood portion' of CIL alongside the 'strategic' portion. Officers have been working with the various neighbourhood forums and other community groups to help crystallise their ideas for infrastructure improvements in their area. They are helping them through the application process so that these projects stand the best chance of success in complying with legislation and the council's policies. Applications are open to these groups until 11<sup>th</sup> September. Officers will then present the applications to the committee with a recommended course of action.

#### **5. Mayfair Neighbourhood Plan**

- 5.1 On 11<sup>th</sup> June 2019 the Council received the examiner's report on the Mayfair Neighbourhood Plan. This recommended that with some modifications, the plan proceed to referendum stage. Key modifications included that:
- the plan needed to acknowledge that ambitions to improve the public realm and pedestrian crossings at Park Lane require further feasibility work, financial costings, and an assessment of impacts on the local environment and wider transport network;
  - the expectation that s106 obligations will be used to fund major interventions to Park lane be downgraded (given this in itself is unlikely to secure sufficient funds);
  - existing green spaces in the neighbourhood area do not merit designation as 'Local Green Spaces', and policies for such areas should focus on mitigating the negative impacts of hosting events in these areas, rather than seeking to dictate who such events are aimed at.

- 5.2 On 11<sup>th</sup> July 2019 the Council issued its decision statement, accepting all of the examiner's proposed modifications. This can be viewed at [https://www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/mayfair\\_neighbourhood\\_plan\\_decision\\_statement.pdf](https://www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/mayfair_neighbourhood_plan_decision_statement.pdf)
- 5.3 Preparations are now being made to hold two referendums on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2019 – one for residents, and one for businesses. If successful at referendum, the plan can be formally 'made'. Once 'made' it will be used alongside the council's own planning policies and the London Plan in determining planning applications in the Mayfair Neighbourhood Area.