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**Portfolio:** Business, Licensing and Planning

**The Report Of:** Councillor Matthew Green, Cabinet Member for Business, Licensing and Planning

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## **City for All – Business, Licensing and Planning Priorities**

### **Thriving Economy**

#### West End Recovery- West End Pop-up Project

- 1.1 Our pop-up programme continues to prioritise local entrepreneurs by providing them with free space in vacant units across some of the world's busiest shopping destinations. In addition, we are providing funding to help fit out these spaces. The programme has been delivered by the council alongside partners including the Business Improvement Districts in order to support the West End and other prominent high streets following the impact COVID-19 has had on businesses. We have delivered eight pop-ups activations to date and we are planning for an additional 13 to be delivered by the end of March 2022.

In partnership with The Crown Estate and Bottletop we have turned former Zara Home on Regent Street into an immersive space by iconic British artist Morag Myerscough. In line with our focus on sustainability, the space will sell sustainable products, focus on a Clean Power campaign and will offer visitors the opportunity to switch to a clean energy provider in store. A soft launch took place at the end of October. At 500 Oxford Street we will be transforming 20,000 square feet into an experiential retail space – it will combine art and retail and include emergent artists, independent brands, designers. There will be a focus on themes that are on the top of retailers' agendas: inclusive sizing, sustainability, gender fluid fashion.

The current NNDR Localism Relief scheme to support pop-up activations has been extended until 31 March 2022. Given the success of the programme, property owners have expressed interest in activating units through the winter period and into Spring 2022. We have received further expressions of interest for longer-term pop-ups activations which we are exploring.

#### West End Recovery- Westminster Investment Service

- 1.2 The Westminster Investment Service (WIS) continues to support both new and established businesses grow and we work closely with the Business Improvement Districts, property owners and partners to identify further investment. We recently supported US Fintech company, Tipalti, who now have opened their European Headquarters in the West End, with their search for permanent office space. They expect to recruit heavily over the next three years and we plan to work closely with them during this period to ensure that we maximise local benefits. In October we also welcomed new diplomatic arrivals to London to

introduce them to our offer. New connections were made with Trade Attachés and we plan to host business delegations to support them to expand in London.

#### West End Recovery- Westminster Reveals

- 1.3 Following the launch of our first destination campaign, Westminster Reveals, we have attracted footfall and showcased a diverse and exciting array of entertainment, hospitality, arts, and culture unique to London. We have contracted external agency Sister to promote our upcoming Christmas events. In total, our Inside Out Festival, which finished at the end of October, attracted 250,000 visitors. Our Underbelly Festival, which finished at the end of September, also attracted 150,000 visitors and sold 25,000 tickets.

We have been working closely with art agency Colab to bring art to our streets. British-Ugandan artist Lakwena Maciver has transformed the unused rooftop above Temple Underground station into a colourful space filled with art. It will remain open until 30 April and incorporates a new studio for artist residencies. This follows the creative quarter in Strand-Aldwych which hosted a skate-park and lessons to encourage young people into the sport.

We have enabled Walk with Amal, a 3.5 metre animated puppet that represents a 9-year-old Syrian refugee on her journey from Syria across Europe, drawing attention to the ongoing refugee crisis and the large number of young girls leaving the education system. It is supported the Arts Council and the Greater London Authority's (GLA) Let's Do London campaign and has attracted over 5,000 residents to date.

#### West End Recovery- Future Occupiers

- 1.4 Following the virtual trade missions to Asia in July, a further mission was held in Europe in October. 40 companies joined us from across Europe from sectors including sustainable fashion; health and wellbeing; museums and experiential; and food and beverage. The programme is currently engaging with 59 companies regarding their expansion into the West End and has made 30 direct introductions between future occupiers and property owners.

#### West End Recovery – Marble Arch Mound

- 1.5 Visitors continue to visit Marble Arch Mound, with 184,772 people having been up the Mound as of 18 November. The exhibition has been a draw for more visitors to the West End, with many going on to spend money on food, attractions and Westminster shops. Since introducing a customer experience feedback tool in September, we have received feedback from 196 visitors. 69% of them would recommend visiting the attraction while 66% said they were visiting the area specifically for the Mound.

#### West End Recovery – Oxford Street District

- 1.6 We are committed to supporting the future success of the nation's favourite high street and its surrounding neighbourhoods. The case for investing in the Oxford Street District is even stronger following the pandemic and in order to satisfy ourselves that the existing approach is the right one, we are currently carrying out an internal programme-wide review to ensure the programme meets key tests relating to the business case, meaningful engagement, the positive impact on residents and cost.

On top of programmes and we have already delivered – such as greening on Oxford Street – our Soho Photography Quarter is under construction. The Quarter will make the space more pedestrian-friendly and include the installation of cross-street banners, art and images curated by the Photographers Gallery. Works on Berners and Newman Street were delivered in October, which is the first step towards the wider Berners and Newman Street Greenway

programme. This project aspires to improve the public realm, including better conditions for pedestrians and cyclists through the reduction of traffic, and introduction of additional greening, street furniture and lighting. We are working with partners on proposals for Manchester Square area which will create a new culture-focused public space, improve pedestrian safety and introduce a dedicated eastbound cycle lane.

#### West End Recovery - Alfresco Hospitality

- 1.7 The alfresco scheme came to an end on 30 September 2021 as businesses now operate indoor dining. The temporary road closures and barriers that were in place have now all been removed. Businesses can still apply for a licence to allow outdoor dining on pavements, providing there is sufficient access for pedestrians. Moving forward there are 11 areas where permanent schemes are being developed.

There are a number of permanent schemes in place or under development. Following a series of consultations, these are Covent Garden, St John's Wood High Street, Elizabeth Street, Eccleston Street, North Audley Street and Pimlico.

#### West End Recovery – Westminster Markets

- 1.8 Westminster Markets have been trialling a number of interventions to revitalise and increase footfall across Westminster, alongside testing new concepts to encourage a greater selection of traders to choose Westminster to start their business. We recently held a Night Market in Rupert Street linked to the International Food Festival, which was well received by residents and businesses in the area. We have also secured £1.2 million from the European Regional Development Fund to run the Digital Street Markets programme which will see Wi-Fi deployed to each of the markets run by the council. Wi-Fi networks will be free for all market traders to access and will provide a fast and reliable internet connection alongside training that will upskill businesses and help them realise the benefits of social media and promotional activity. Berwick Street Wi-Fi is now operating and shortly other market areas will go live.

### **Training and Employment**

#### Westminster Employment Service

- 1.9 To date, 25 Kickstart vacancies at the council have been filled by Westminster residents. We are redoubling our efforts to recruit to the remaining five opportunities. Hiring managers report that they are impressed with the quality and calibre of Kickstart recruits and having more Westminster residents joining our workforce shapes our services for the better. Westminster Adult Education Service is also supporting Kickstarters through their employability programme. Beyond this, we also support external organisations recruit through Kickstart and to date 12 vacancies have been filled. Given the Chancellor extended the Kickstart Scheme until March 2022, we will continue to support residents access employment opportunities.

As part of our Westminster Employment Service programme, over 540 residents have registered for support since April and we have supported 288 into employment against an annual target of 320. Given the success of the service we have increased our annual target to support 420 residents into work. We have also surpassed our annual target of 42 by supporting 51 residents progress into roles that offer higher salaries or provide access to further training. We continue to support more residents than ever to remain and progress into work through training, volunteering, support with debt and money management and more.

## Westminster Wheels

2. Westminster Wheels to date has trained and offered 25 young people from Westminster paid employment. All participants were previously unemployed. Our most recent cohort of five residents completed their training in September and began working in the Westminster Wheels shop on Church Street. A further two roles are being recruited through Kickstart to support sales and they will start working with Westminster Wheels in December. In addition, Westminster Wheels continues to make a positive contribution to the Church Street community and beyond. We took part in the Clean Air Action Day where the project was promoted to residents and stakeholders. We are working with the Markets team to promote in other locations, we have agreed a programme of promotional activity with the University of Westminster and we continue to encourage residents and businesses to donate bikes. We plan to donate two dozen bikes to the community in the run up to Christmas.

## Westminster Adult Education Service

- 2.1 Despite challenges, Westminster Adult Education Service has achieved exceptional results for learners. Our overall achievement rate for 2020/21 is 88.6% for over 5,300 learners. This compared favourably against the 87% achievement rate prior to COVID-19. Recently we have hosted several workshops to raise the profile of lifelong learning as part of Lifelong Learning Week. We have championed local providers and showcased our offer, and workshops have supported residents with CVs, LinkedIn advice, UCAS applications, interview techniques, practice interviews and career coaching. Mental health and wellbeing activities were also on offer.

Our new Digital Careers programme has proved incredibly popular. Our partnership with Amazon Web Services and Westminster Employment Service is already oversubscribed with all 25 spaces filled. Given our expertise, the British Library awarded WAES a contract to lead the British Library apprenticeship programme for the Level 3 Library, Information and Archive Services Assistant. A team of eight new apprentices are due to start in January 2022. Beyond our core offer, we will be supporting residents achieve qualifications through the National Skills Fund, part of the Government's Plan for Jobs.

## **Place Shaping**

### Strand Aldwych

- 2.2 The Strand Aldwych project has achieved its first major milestone by converting what was an area with high levels of traffic and pollution, into a new cultural learning quarter. In September we held 'September on the Strand' which drew thousands of visitors. It included a pop-up skate park which provided 250 free skate-boarding lessons. Construction is ongoing on the Strand and the Aldwych two-way scheme is due to complete at the end of 2022.

The construction project is being delivered to time and on budget according to the £18,090,232 approval gained in December 2020. The total scheme spend to the end of period 5 on the Aldwych 2-way and Strand Meanwhile elements of the scheme is £9.938million. Partners have contributed to this project through attending workshops, providing meeting space and financing supporting studies.

### Harrow Road

- 2.3 Following the completion of the Harrow Road Place Plan in August 2021, we are progressing the design and planning at Harrow Road and Westbourne Green as well as the Maida Hill

Market. Community feedback has been gathered and we intend to hold a public consultation in the coming weeks. Work is expected to start on the sites in summer next year.

The Place Shaping team secured £900,000 towards the delivery of Harrow Road Place Plan from the Greater London Authority's Good Growth Fund (GGF) in 2020. This funding is matched by Westminster's Programme to provide a total project budget of £1.8m.

### Victoria Place Plan

- 2.4 Work is underway to explore how we can introduce enhanced greening to Victoria Street and we are in the process of developing a strategy and identifying a first tranche of permanent projects that can be delivered across the course of the next financial year. £300,000 has been ringfenced within the capital programme to carry out design and technical work in support of the strategy and seed fund the first tranche of project delivery in 2022/23. Contribution from partners will be decided once a set of deliverables has been identified.

We are leading on a project to renovate the Lillington and Longmoore Gardens Community Centre and develop an Open Spaces and Play Strategy for the estate. In partnership with residents, we are currently reviewing the designs and will be submitting a planning application in due course. £750,000 has been ringfenced within the 2021/22 and 2022/23 Capital Programmes to carry out design work and seed fund project delivery. £47,572 has been allocated to project delivery via the Open Spaces, Greener Places programme. An application for circa £925,075 has also been made to the Carbon Offset Fund to further contribute towards project delivery costs.

The Future Victoria Masterplan was disrupted by COVID-19 but we are recommencing community engagement in early 2022 to assist with the completion of the concept masterplan for the station and surrounding areas. £50,000 has been ringfenced within the 2021/22 Capital Programme to cover expected costs associated with recommenced engagement activities. As a key project partner, Network Rail will be contributing towards the costs of engagement work once it recommences.

### Soho

- 2.5 Our Vision for Soho aims to develop a positive vision statement, set of objectives, and projects that will address current and emerging pressures facing Soho. We continue to engage with Soho's communities and have held a series of workshops to understand their priorities. Once completed, the Vision for Soho will sit alongside the Soho Neighbourhood Plan to provide a comprehensive plan for Soho's future. £1.8 million has been ringfenced to support the delivery of Vision for Soho projects over the course of 2022/23. A legal situation has arisen which may impact the programme timeline.

£1.8 million from the Council's Capital Programme has been ringfenced to support the delivery of Vision for Soho projects in 2022/23.

### Open Spaces, Greener Places

- 2.6 The Open Spaces, Greener Places programme comprises a number of schemes to improve the quantity and quality of our open spaces and green infrastructure. Ten schemes were successful in securing funding for 2021/22 including improvements to parks and open spaces, play facilities, and green infrastructure. These schemes are:
- Greening Baker St (George's Park)
  - Barkour Park, Paddington Rec
  - Shrewsbury Green Oasis

- Queen’s Park Gardens
- Lillington Gardens
- St John’s Church Gardens
- Wharnccliffe Gardens
- Selby Square, Queen’s Park
- Lisson Green Estate
- Adventure Playground, St John’s Wood.

A mid-year review of progress is being undertaken to ensure all projects are on track to be delivered by April 2022.

### Paddington

- 2.7 We are exploring options for taking the Paddington Places strategy forward. The emerging strategy sets out the council’s position on the area’s place shaping potential and provides a collective forward plan for all stakeholders adopt to deliver a high quality and holistic design for the area. The strategy is designed to support better movement of pedestrians and cyclists and unlock possibilities for healthier environments for the local community. In the coming months, we expect to take forward several projects, the first being a detailed design for Stone Wharf Gardens.

The strategy is at an early stage and not yet costed. Potential sources of funding have been identified, including existing planning application contributions allocated to the area; capital funding through the Place Shaping portfolio; CIL; and stakeholder development sites.

## **Vibrant Communities**

### Gambling Licensing Policy

- 2.8 We have published our Gambling Policy, which we are required to do every three years. Following a review, we have developed a new approach that will attempt to provide greater controls and better protect residents, especially those at risk of related harms from gambling. The approach will enable the council, residents, and the Licensing Sub-Committee to challenge the “aim to permit” principle. The principle creates a presumption in favour of granting a permit and puts the council on the back foot because the starting position favours the applicant. As part of this work, we have also developed a Local Area Profile that will provide applicants with information on the demographic living in the area and the general risk to gambling related harm. The Local Area Profile designates Gambling Vulnerability Zones and applications in these areas will have a greater scrutiny and limited hours. The consultation period for the new policy has been open since 27 September and closes on 28 November. The new Gambling Policy will be introduced by Spring of 2022.

### Environmental Supplementary Planning Document

- 2.9 We are finalising the Environment Supplementary Planning Document for adoption to ensure it takes account of our Climate Emergency Action Plan, the latest guidance from the GLA, and incorporates the views of residents, businesses, developers and other partners. We are also working on a new Statement of Community Involvement, which will set out the principles of the council’s engagement with communities on planning issues. This will also include our continuing commitment to supporting communities produce neighbourhood plans. The Pimlico Neighbourhood Forum’s plan is now being independently examined and there are others in the pipeline currently being prepared by our dedicated Neighbourhood Fora across the City.

Our commitment to neighbourhood planning remains strong and we want to ensure the voices of local communities continues to be heard.

We have prepared a new Article 4 Direction to allow the council to retain planning controls in our designated high streets that lie outside of the Central Activities Zone, covering more than 30 locations. The Direction will ensure new permitted development rights allowing the conversion of commercial properties to residential use does not compromise the vitality and viability of our high streets.

Following successful referendums in Soho, Fitzrovia West, and Queen's Park, we have now adopted three new neighbourhood plans in Westminster. These plans carry full weight in individual planning decisions alongside the City Plan and London Plan. Neighbourhood plans are a fundamental part of the planning system and reflect our communities' priorities for how they want to see their local area grow and change, as well as to help protect what they love.

### Planning

3. The application determination performance of the Town Planning Service continues to exceed the level required of the Department for Levelling Up and Communities. For Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 of 2021/22, 77% of Non-Major applications have been determined within their target determination date whilst 83% of Major applications have been determined within their target determination date.

2,039 applications were received during Quarter 2 of 2021/22. This is an increase of 47 applications (2.4%) versus the same period during 2020/21 but remains down by 261 applications (-11%) on 2019/20, the last pre-pandemic year. The number of applications received has fallen by 47 relative to Quarter 1 of 2021/22 (2,095). Prior to this application numbers increased in four consecutive quarters post pandemic. We are confident that application numbers are continuing to transition back towards pre-pandemic levels.

### Holocaust Memorial – Victoria Tower Gardens

- 3.1 Following the call-in of the Holocaust Memorial, a claim has been made to challenge the planning permission. On 28 October, the High Court granted the challenge permission to proceed on two of the five grounds the Claimant cited. The case will now proceed to a substantive hearing and a date is expected to be confirmed shortly.

## **4. Cabinet Member Key Decisions**

Since the last Business and Children's Policy and Scrutiny Committee, I have formally approved the following key decisions:

- Marble Arch Mound – Project and Financial Update
- Soho Neighbourhood Plan
- Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Plan
- Local List of Information Requirements for Planning and Associated Applications
- Article 4 Direction
- Local Development Scheme
- Gambling Policy
- Queen's Park Neighbourhood Plan