



<b>Date:</b>	09 March 2023
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Planning and Economic Development
<b>The Report of:</b>	Councillor Geoff Barraclough
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- 1. The following key decisions have been made in the period since my last Policy & Scrutiny report dated 08 November 2022:**
  - 02 November 2022 – Oxford Street Programme
  - 25 November 2022 - Confirmation of Westminster's Non-Immediate Article 4 Direction for change of use from Class E (commercial, business and service uses) to Class C3 (dwellinghouses) outside of the Central Activities Zone (CAZ)
  - 08 February 2023 – Westminster Design Review Panel
- 2. The following report includes my priorities and delivery progress to date of the new administration.**

## Economy

### 2.1 Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

BIDs play an important role in the borough's economic geography and are increasingly supporting community programmes. It is vital that the City Council creates the right forums for ongoing engagement and partnership working with BIDs. In consultation with BID CEOs, we have initiated a regular schedule of bi-annual Cabinet Member & BID CEO one-to-one meetings, and Cabinet Member and BID CEO quarterly Roundtable Meetings to discuss opportunities / issues of wider interest across the BIDs. We began quarterly WCC Senior Officer and BID Forums in January 2023 to create space and time for BIDs to raise and discuss detailed operational related matters with senior officers.

Paddington Now BID won its ballot on 11 November with 89.86% in favour by number of votes cast and 94.33% by aggregate rateable value of each hereditament.

Baker Street Quarter Partnership BID won its renewal and alteration ballot on 25 November with 98.73% in favour by number of votes cast and 99.11% by aggregate rateable value of each hereditament.

Two more ballots are scheduled to take place this financial year. West Fitzrovia is a new BID proposal that will border with the existing Fitzrovia Partnership BID in Camden, and the ballot will take place on 20 June 2023. The second set of ballots is for a new BID proposal to

include the St. James's area bordering the existing HOLBA BID. This will require both a property owner and occupier ballot and is planned for 25 and 26 September 2023. Cabinet Member reports will be sent on these two new BID proposals in February and May 2023 respectively.

## **2.2 Cost of Living Campaign with Businesses**

Thanks to local businesses for making £49,000 of financial contributions over the Christmas period to support local charities including the North Paddington Foodbank, the School Uniform Bank and other local food projects including Food Pantries.

We have received £1.3m S106 contributions from developers totalling in the last quarter to support the Westminster Employment Service and our cost-of-living efforts to provide low income and unemployed residents with London Living Wage employment.

## **2.3 Westminster Investment Service**

[Nothing](#) a London-based tech brand opened their first and flagship UK store in Soho December 2022. Nothing was supported by London and Partners' West End Future Occupiers Programme and the Westminster Investment Service, who first met the brand in October 2021.

Westminster welcomed a trade delegation of 16 international retail and hospitality brands in October 2022 following which, a Malaysian Restaurant that was part of the mission has confirmed their first site in UK, in Paddington and set to open in early 2023. The mission was organised by London & Partners supported by landowners and BIDs.

London & Partners is planning its next inbound mission for April 2023, hosting a group of international brands actively looking to expand into the capital. London & Partners is aiming for a good mix of retail, hospitality and experiential across target markets of US, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. London & Partners also travelled to the US, Tokyo and Seoul during January and February 2023 to proactively recruit brands for the West End Future Occupiers Programme.

## **2.4 West End Pop-ups & Meanwhile Activations Programme**

We are developing activation concepts and financial models for Phase 3 of the Pop-up and Meanwhile Uses Programme including a draft strategy developed with the New West End Company BID area aligning to its brand pillars. We are currently in discussion with property owners on a couple of units. We have completed the procurement for a space operator contract for Phase 3. The standstill period has now come to an end and we are at a point where we can progress the award of contract.

Phase 2 activations have now come to an end with the exception of The Good Store. To date, the programme has fully activated 12 void units in the West End, supporting over 43 brands, emerging artist, social enterprises, and start-ups. In October last year, the programme won the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) Local Government Regional Category Award for Best Programme of Business Support for Small Businesses.

## **2.5 Enterprise Space**

The Rebel Business School launched on 29 November and marked the transformation of the previously vacant council property at 470 Harrow Road into a new 2,000 sq. ft. community enterprise space and business school with Rebel having taken on the first 5-year lease. Rebel will be running regular start-up and growth courses offering free business training to new start-ups, young people and local entrepreneurs. In addition, they will be offering free ongoing support for 60 local residents per year to turn ideas into successful business ventures, which will include co-working spaces, networking events, live Q&A events and mentoring programmes. Rebel ran their first course in the building in January. It was an open course over 2 weeks available to anyone but targeted to Westminster residents who want to start or grow their business.

## **2.6 Employment**

### Westminster Employment Service

We organised a job fair at the Lords in November with 47 employers attending generating 76 new registrations from residents for support and interview and job starts for attendees.

Other significant recruitment activity includes supporting 22 residents into apprenticeships at the Council and ongoing support to the Peninsula Hotel and Waitrose. A job fair with Council suppliers is planned in February.

### Westminster Works update

Since the launch of the project in November, the Step Ahead team delivering Westminster Works has focussed on recruiting people to the programme. Candidate engagement continues to be effective and over 2,800 people have registered as of December. 40 have started jobs (and stayed more than 2 months) but we anticipate a significant increase in starts from March 2023. The project team is anticipating that the programme target of 2,200 vacancies filled by 31 March 2024 will be delivered and we will closely monitor actuals against forecasts each month.

## **2.7 Markets**

In close partnership with external stakeholder the LCCA, the Markets Team hosted three Night Markets at Newport Place, Soho, in the heart of Chinatown from 16-18 January 2023. The rationale behind the event was to provide a localised celebration for the Chinese Community, ahead of the main celebrations in Trafalgar Square.

### **Place-shaping**

## **2.8 High Streets**

### North Paddington Programme

As outlined in the Fairer Westminster Strategy, Westminster City Council has a clear agenda to deliver a more equitable borough. The North Paddington Programme was formally approved by Cabinet on 13 February 2023. This place-based delivery programme will be piloted in the North-West of the borough (including the wards Harrow Road, Queens Park and Westbourne), where there are some of the highest levels of deprivation in Westminster;

with lower levels of income, health, and higher levels of unemployment, than elsewhere in the City.

The Programme will start with the newly created North Paddington Partnership Board, made up of a diverse and influential group of local stakeholders from a range of sectors, with a strong connections to the area. The Board will be critical to supporting the development of vision, design, and priorities for the North Paddington Programme. In this first instance the ambition is to finalise the programme's vision with the Partnerships inputs. Alongside this, forums such as the North Paddington Officer Steering group have assembled, to improve internal working and collaboration.

Embedded in the Programme is a new structure for working, which ensures community engagement and collaboration informs decision making. Under the Programme, projects such as the Maida Hill Market redevelopment will be supported and co-ordinated by the North Paddington team, demonstrating a new way of working, and delivering community engagement, to improve outcomes for our communities.

### Strand Aldwych

Strand Aldwych was successfully launched on 6 December 2022, at an opening ceremony with the Leader and Lord Mayor. The event was well supported by local stakeholders, including Kings College, and marks the creation of over 7000m<sup>2</sup> new public open space in central London. The scheme has removed a polluted 4-lane gyratory and introduced two-way traffic movement around Aldwych with no traffic displacement, better safety with new and improved junctions, significant additional green infrastructure and a management model to support a curated programme of activity, bringing content from the cultural, educational and creative institutions in the area into the public domain.

### Harrow Road/North Paddington

The administration offered increased budget for these three projects which were previously failing to deliver the anticipated outcomes.

Following an internal ambition review officers are progressing the three Good Growth Fund projects in the Harrow Road Area – Maida Hill Market, Westbourne Green Open Space and Harrow Road Open Space. Working Group meetings are taking place with community members that have been involved with the projects since the beginning, to discuss the enhanced proposals for each of the three sites. The Place Shaping team will next be working closely with colleagues in the Communities department to carry out wider reaching engagement with local people to ensure the proposals are reflective of local need and ambition.

Beyond this work is under way to develop other priorities identified in the Place Plan including those related to the High Street, Canalside and healthy neighbourhoods.

## **2.9 West End and Central Activities Zone**

### Soho

Officers have developed a draft Soho Monitoring Study brief which has been shared with the Soho Community Advisory Group (a group of Soho stakeholders comprising residents and business assembled with assistance from Lead Member for Soho) for comment. Once we have received comments, officers will continue working with Ward Councillors to progress plans to monitor traffic / movement, noise, and air quality in Soho.

## Covent Garden

We have published the Covent Garden Public Realm Framework. This document presents a vision and key design principles to protect and improve the public realm, bringing together shared ambitions from Westminster City Council and key stakeholders for the future of Covent Garden.

The document is not a commitment that the Council will provide the measures laid out in the document. Specific projects will be subject to individual detailed design processes as and when appropriate. It will be reviewed and updated every two years alongside our stakeholders and partners.

Westminster City Council and the London Borough of Camden are working together to deliver a Neighbourhood Traffic Management scheme in Covent Garden through an 18 month trial. At the end of the trial, both councils will review the comments and data collected and take a decision on whether the scheme will become permanent.

## Oxford Street

We have refined the Oxford Street programme to focus on the delivery of Oxford Street itself from Marble Arch through to Tottenham Court Road with completion targeted for Spring 2026. The project is progressing with the commissioning of the first stage of design and the indicative cost of the scheme both of which are due to be completed in Spring 2023.

The design will make Oxford Street a great place to live, work and visit through a creation of high quality and attractive enhanced public realm. This endeavour is supported by revised governance, updated traffic surveys and modelling, a new engagement strategy, project specific engagement plans, and a revised business case for the programme. Engagement activity has begun, to fully understand what our communities and visitors would like to see for the future of Oxford Street, and these events will continue in the coming months to ensure that everybody has an opportunity to participate in the future of the London's High Street..

## **Town Planning and Planning Policy**

### **2.10 City Plan Review**

Consultation on the first formal stage of consultation (known as Regulation 18 consultation) on our proposed partial review of the City Plan closed on 18 November 2022. In order to better align the City Plan with the Fairer Westminster Strategy, the consultation sets out our intentions to amend policies on affordable housing to secure more genuinely affordable housing, and introduce a stronger preference for the retrofit of existing buildings rather than demolition and redevelopment. It also sets out the intention to incorporate Site Allocations that provide site specific guidance on how key sites should be developed into the City Plan, rather than addressing through a separate standalone document as previously planned.

We received 47 separate responses to the consultation - a similar amount to that received at Regulation 18 of the existing City Plan. Responses came from a wide cross-section of organisations including individual residents, resident groups e.g. neighbourhood forums, statutory consultees, charities/campaign groups, developers/ landowners and businesses/BIDs. Feedback has been largely supportive of the council's broad ambitions in relation to affordable housing, retrofit and refurbishment, and site allocations, whilst also raising some important points to consider as policies are drafted and supporting evidence prepared. These include:

- concerns over the potential impacts on development viability of any changes to affordable housing policies (both in terms of tenure mix, and seeking provision from schemes delivering less than 10 homes);
- that the continued provision of intermediate housing for key workers and those supporting the Westminster economy will remain important;
- that any retrofit policy should be 'retrofit first' and not 'retrofit only' and make clear where demolition and rebuild can be supported;
- that any retrofit policy needs to work for both modern and historic developments, and not have negative impacts on Westminster's high-quality townscape and heritage value; and
- Submitting information on sites that landowners and developers think merit inclusion as a Site Allocation.

Now initial consultation feedback has been analysed, officers are now scoping what evidence is needed and starting to draft policies and review potential site allocations.

We are planning ongoing engagement with stakeholders throughout this process to build consensus for the new policies and any site allocations before formal (Regulation 19) consultation on a final draft plan. Regulation 19 consultation is scheduled to happen towards the end of the year and will be a final opportunity to comment before the plan is submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for independent examination in 2024.

## **2.11 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)**

### Public Realm SPD

The Public Realm SPD will replace and consolidate the outdated 2011 'Westminster Way' SPD and other old Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPGs) to set out technical guidance on the council's approach to making, changing, and managing the public realm. It will help ensure consistency in the design, delivery and maintenance of such spaces in a manner that ensures places are welcoming, healthy, and safe for all users, and make a positive contribution towards the climate emergency.

A draft document is in production and officers are preparing a period of targeted informal engagement with key external stakeholders to further inform this. It will include engagement with Neighbourhood Forums, Amenity Societies, Accessibility groups and the BIDs, to better understand their current experience and aspirations for the public realm in Westminster, or views on the existing guidance to be replaced. Statutory six week consultation on the draft SPD is then anticipated to take place in the Spring.

### Planning Obligations and Affordable Housing SPD

The Planning Obligations and Affordable Housing SPD plays a vital role in providing clarity on when planning obligations such as s106 agreements will be sought to make development acceptable, and how financial contributions are to be calculated – such as for payments towards off site affordable housing, employment and skills programmes, and carbon-offsetting.

Under the previous administration a Draft of the SPD was consulted on in March 2022. It has subsequently been redrafted, both in response to issues raised during consultation, and to better reflect our ambitions for securing genuinely affordable housing – particularly to ensure intermediate housing better caters for key workers and those on average incomes.

A viability assessment is also being commissioned to ensure the cumulative impact of the asks in the document do not undermine development viability – which was one of the key concerns raised by the development industry on the previous iteration of the document. Once this is complete, a further six week consultation period on the redrafted SPD and its supporting evidence will be carried out – currently anticipated for the Spring.

## **2.12 Statement of Community Involvement**

Local Planning Authorities are required to review their SCIs every five years to reflect changes to engagement and to respond to changes in policy. As our adopted SCI was published in 2014 an update is overdue. Since it was adopted, not only has the council's planning policies have evolved (notably, with the new Westminster City Plan being adopted in 2021), but also new technologies have emerged, and we have learnt new ways of working with our communities particularly from the pandemic and through experiences such as Westminster Connects. An update to the SCI helps ensure we can meet our statutory duties and improve the way we engage with our communities in a meaningful and proportionate way, in line with the commitments made in the Fairer Westminster Strategy.

We launched public consultation on a draft document at the end of January for a period of six weeks. Feedback received through this consultation will then be used to inform any revisions before it is formally adopted.

## **2.13 Design Review Panel**

Officers in Town Planning have begun work to establish a Design Review Panel for Westminster. The panel will be a multidisciplinary group of experts (including architects, place-making, sustainability and planning professionals). Design Review Panels act in an independent advisory capacity providing constructive review of development and public realm proposals and projects from a design perspective, usually at pre-application stage.

Design review is a requirement in national and London Plan policy and the Design Review Panel will provide an independent voice to promote design excellence, providing access to a wide, expert skill-set to ensure innovative and sustainable design solutions in new development which will help deliver on wider Fairer Westminster objectives. The cost of the design review panel will be borne by the applicants.

Detailed working arrangements are being finalised by officers and a recruitment process for panel members has been initiated, with a view to having a panel in place by late Spring/early Summer.

## **2.14 World Heritage Site**

The Westminster World Heritage Site Steering Group, which is chaired by Westminster City Council, met in November 2022 for the first in person meeting since the pandemic. At this meeting there were updates on projects affecting the site from key stakeholders including the Palace of Westminster (Parliamentary Estates), Restoration and Renewal Delivery Authority, Westminster Abbey and the Greater London Authority.

Following this meeting a 'State of Conservation Report' was prepared and submitted to UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) which provides details of work being undertaken by the various stakeholders on the steering group to address recommendations previously made in relation to improving the Site's protection

and management. This will be considered by the World Heritage Committee in Summer 2023. A key element of work to improve protection of the site is production of a revised World Heritage Site Management Plan, which is being led by the council and will sets out a framework for effective management of the site. Officers are currently working on a draft of this document and a further steering group is due to be held in the Spring where progress on the draft will be considered before it is finalised for public consultation.

## **Smart City**

### **2.15 Small Cell Concession**

Westminster already has extensive 3G coverage but due to increasing demands on the network connectivity can be very slow and based on both anecdotal and tangible evidence is having an increasing impact on residents, businesses and visitors. Increased 4G and 5G coverage can be achieved through the deployment of Small Cells.

In 2017 the Council ran an open tender process to establish a concessionaire for street assets in relation to the deployment of small cell technologies (4G, 5G and Wi-Fi). Ontix were successful in securing the contract, and this has now been operating since June 2018. In this time, they have built 120 small cells and deployed 114 wi-fi access points.

### **2.16 Connect Westminster**

The Connect Westminster Business voucher scheme was launched in August 2017 with a funding pot of £2m. Businesses with a connection speed of less than 30Mbps are eligible for a grant of £2,000 to upgrade to a gigabit capable connection. Vouchers have made large areas of the borough commercially viable for broadband providers to invest, accelerating their rollout plans. There has been a significant improvement in broadband speeds for voucher recipients with a 2,000% average increase in download speeds and a 9,900% increase in upload speeds.

#### *Delivery to date*

Total vouchers paid: 864 (68 awaiting connection and payment)

Funding distributed to SMEs: £1.73m

Active providers: 40

We have secured £300k additional ERDF funding to connect an additional 100 businesses and we are seeking an extension to deliver the scheme until the end of June 2023. To ensure ongoing delivery of vouchers within Westminster we are looking to bid for UKSPF funding to deliver a voucher scheme across Westminster and London.

### **2.17 Smart City Operating System – Air Quality (AQ) Platform**

Following the development of our base AQ platform we are currently undertaking internal testing of reporting dashboards, before making the necessary changes to allow selected third party users to review the dashboards and provide further feedback in late February/March. Alongside this we are developing an export file and API for third parties to directly access all AQ data we are able to share. Once tested internally this too will be made available for external review.

### **2.18 Digital Inclusion**

Working with the telecoms suppliers, we have been able to provide a digital cost of living support package worth over £23,500 to help over 150 households initially, with scope to



increase further. We have been able to provide devices and internet connections to residents as part of the cost of living support package.

#### Skills and confidence

Officers in Smart City carried piloted a scheme with the Housing Support team to test digital inclusion triage. Over 300 residents were referred and triaged over three months. Over 70 Community Fibre Digital Ambassador sessions held across three libraries, with over 250 appointments booked by residents

We have established a Digital Skills for Employment working group to close the digital skills gap through partnership working and effective referrals. Over 250 people attended 16 events during Get Online Week in November, working with partners cross the sector.

We delivered five courses each lasting 10 days for businesses in Westminster with 175 businesses attending. These offer drop-in style sessions covering creating a website, social media use and marketing, networking, legal requirements and more. 13 street market traders have attended training covering use of contactless devices, SEO, reaching new customers and more.

Working with NHS partners, we launched a pilot to test the Omron Hypertension app and dashboard to help patients and GPs to reduce the need for appointments and increase independence in monitoring. A social prescription model for digital inclusion is being developed, with partners including Housing, Public Health, Adult Social Care, Open Age, Libraries and more.