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Portfolio:	Planning and Economic Development
The Report of:	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 09 March 2023:**
 - 15 March 2023 – Neighbourhood CIL Decisions: Winter 2023 Application Round
- 2. The following report includes my priorities and delivery progress since my last report:**

Economy

2.1 Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

The second quarterly BID roundtable was held on 21 March, where a range of strategic issues were discussed, complimenting the more operational nature of the quarterly forums for BIDs and senior officers. Engagement from BIDs at these meetings continues to be positive.

In March 2023, the London Heritage Quarter BIDs (Northbank, Victoria Westminster and Whitehall BIDs) held successful renewal ballots for their members, with the following results:

- Northbank BID: the majority of the business ratepayers in the BID area who voted, voting in favour of the proposal, both by aggregate rateable value (98.3%) and numbers voting (94.5%)
- Victoria Westminster BID: the majority of the business ratepayers in the BID area who voted, voting in favour of the proposal, both by aggregate rateable value (99.8%) and numbers voting (97.9%)
- Whitehall BID: the majority of the business ratepayers in the BID area who voted, voting in favour of the proposal, both by aggregate rateable value (93%) and numbers voting (81.3%)

Two more ballots are scheduled to take place this year. West Fitzrovia is a new BID proposal that will border with the existing Fitzrovia Partnership BID in Camden, with the ballot taking place on 20 June. 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 late September.

2.2 Fairer Economy Strategy

The Fairer Economy Plan 2023 – 2026 is being developed and builds on the key strategic outcomes from the Fairer Westminster Strategy and Delivery Plan and the draft recommendations from the Future of Westminster Commission. The plan will set out the key challenges being faced right now and how the council proposes to respond within the next three years – this includes current delivery as well as new activity to be explored and developed. The Plan will not articulate the council's long-term vision for the economy but is the start of a longer process to co-develop a strategic vision for a fairer economy with stakeholders.

There are three key sections:

- 1) Resilient Businesses and High streets;
- 2) Vibrant West End; and
- 3) Employment Opportunities for All.

There has been extensive internal engagement with four cross-departmental workshops and briefings with Cabinet Members, ward councillors and the Leader. There has been some external engagement as part of the plan development, but most of the engagement will take place once the plan has been published. The engagement will not be a formal consultation but an ongoing conversation and partnership approach to evolving and reviewing the plan and co-creating key activity.

The launch and publication of the Fairer Economy Plan 2023 –2026 will be held week commencing 5 June 2023.

2.3 Cost of Living, Social Value & CSR

Recent activities led by the team have helped to secure £185,000 of financial donations in Q4 from businesses to community organisations such as the North Paddington Food Bank, Abbey Community Centre, The Marylebone Women's Project, Young Westminster Foundation, Centrepoint and homeless shelters.

Social Value Impact Report

The team have been working with colleagues across the council to introduce a quarterly reporting process and an annual impact report detailing how suppliers support residents, communities and VCS organisations across Westminster. The impact report covering will cover the 2022-23 financial year and be published in Q1 of 2023/24.

2.4 Westminster Investment Service

Following the success of the London Retail Mission held in October 2022, London & Partners have confirmed their next inbound mission for 24 – 26 April 2023. The Retail, Leisure and Hospitality mission will welcome senior representatives of international, high-growth businesses to the West End for a series of events, talks and tours as part of efforts to successfully land these businesses. Business attending the mission will range from those at

early stages considering Westminster as a location to grow their business, through to those at an advanced stage i.e. actively searching for suitable property.

2.5 Meanwhile Activations Programme

Officers have developed activation concepts and financial models for Phase 3 of the Meanwhile Activations Programme including a draft strategy produced with the New West End Company BID area and aligning to its brand pillars. South Space Studios Ltd has been appointed as space operators for Phase 3 of the programme to deliver up to nine activations over a period of 3 years. The Occupiers and Property Owners Guide is being developed to set out a delivery framework for the activations. Officers are also preparing a Commission Brief to provide details about the application process to brands that want to participate in the programme.

2.6 Careers, Enterprise and Skills

On 25 April, Economy officers will deliver an event in partnership with the University of Westminster, Inclusive Futures: Insights - an employability-focused programme providing up to 50 first and second year students from typically unrepresented backgrounds in Higher Education (such as Global Majority heritage, students with disabilities, care leavers) the chance to grow their network, build confidence and gain an invaluable insight into career opportunities in London. Participants are granted a bursary for taking part and during the programme, students attend insight sessions, skills workshops and have 1:1 meetings with a mentor. This is the second consecutive year that Westminster City Council is participating in this initiative for and will deliver workshops to enable participants to learn about careers in local government.

2.7 Employment

Westminster Employment Service

Recent activity includes the Construction Job Fair in January (Westbourne Park Baptist Church) and our Spring Job Fair for Council suppliers (Stowe Centre) attracting over 30 employers with live vacancies and over 250 attendees. On the day activities at the job fairs also include employer led sessions to help employability skills, including CV writing and interview technique. Outcomes for residents are tracked and reported in quarterly reporting for the Employment Service due at the end of April.

The Coaching strand of Westminster Employment Service has secured additional funding from the Homes for Ukrainians scheme to extend employability support to referrals beyond the initial funding period November 2022 to March 2023 into the next financial year.

Westminster Wheels

In January, Westminster Wheels became a stand-alone social enterprise, following considerable support from the Council over the past two years to secure premises in Church Street, provide interim project management and to make connections with donors of

unwanted, old or disused bikes. Over £100,000 in corporate sponsorship has been leveraged via support from WCC Economy.

To date, the project has provided 31 unemployed residents with bike mechanic training qualifications and six-month London Living Wage placements; refurbished and sold 677 bikes and donated 307 bikes to low-income families.

Westminster Works

Westminster Works, a programme to support the Hospitality and Leisure sectors attract and retain talent, has engaged with over 2650 candidates and 140 employers offering London Living Wage vacancies to date. Over 40 job starts were recorded in January and February. Currently, the service is promoting over 560 live vacancies. The priority for the partnership is to continue to filter and screen the pool of applicants to ensure they meet the current vacancy criteria and place them in appropriate roles.

2.8 Markets

Berwick Street – Community Saturdays

The Markets team launched Community Saturdays on Berwick Street to raise visibility and awareness of the market's trade on Saturdays and to bring together members of the local community who have businesses. The programme will run on the first Saturday of the month from April to July.

Data from the first Community Saturday on 01 April showed that 75% of participants had increased trade compared to a normal trading day, all reporting a 25-49% increase in customers. There was at least a 50% increase in sales for 11% of traders. Community feedback has been entirely positive.

Place-shaping

2.9 High Streets

North Paddington Programme

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, Queen's 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.

Embedded in the Programme is a new framework for working, which promotes community engagement and collaboration between officers, politicians, communities and business leaders and local stakeholders informs decision-making. Under the Programme, projects such as the GGF 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.

Officers continue to develop the three Good Growth Fund (GGF) projects at Maida Hill Market, Queen's Park Canalside and Westbourne Green Open Space.

The consultation for the Maida Hill Market project closed on 23 April 2023 after six weeks of engagement on the current proposals. Feedback and levels of support of the scheme will now be reviewed, but initial findings show over 82% of the public support the project's proposed designs. If the project is approved, there is an aspiration to begin work on site following Notting Hill Carnival in September 2023.

Planning and preparation for public engagement events are underway for Queen's Park Canalside and Westbourne Green Open Space. The next public engagement events will commence in late April and early May 2023. Beyond the GGF projects, work is under way to develop other opportunities identified through previous Place Plan work and in emerging priorities identified by the North Paddington Partnership Board, which was established in March 2023 and brings together stakeholders from across the North Paddington community who represent a range of different sectors including the Police, Education, Health and Business.

The Council is now actively working with the North Paddington Partnership Board towards the vision of making North Paddington safer, healthier and wealthier through improving outcomes linked to education, employment, health and wellbeing, crime and safety, climate, community and housing a comprehensive programme of work is being developed and will be delivered by teams across the Council, as well as in collaboration with community partners.

We are now working with local communities and stakeholders to build a community strategy for the programme, with the aim of maximising connections and relations with the communities across these wards. Finally, the proposed year one delivery programme will be the subject of a subsequent Cabinet Member Report. The aim is to drive the momentum for change in year one by delivering immediate improvements, alongside the creation of truly transformative projects, which will be built on as the Programme continues to develop and be informed through the collaborative, community approach.

High Streets Programme

In 2022, the Council committed £10m of capital funding to support the resilience and vibrancy of Westminster's high streets outside of the West End, bringing the local communities' needs and aspirations upfront. The Place Shaping team, in collaboration with Economy and Highways teams, have been scoping the development of a multi-disciplinary programme that helps to deliver the Fairer Westminster Strategy, focused on addressing challenges that high streets are currently facing and maximising the opportunities they offer.

After an initial assessment across Westminster's high streets, a focus on a cluster of high streets around Paddington-Queensway has been agreed due to a series of challenges that are present across these high streets, including poor active travel, safety and anti-social behaviour, poor quality offer and environment, limited cultural and community offer, and surrounding deprivation. These areas include Edgware Road, Praed Street, Queensway / Westbourne Grove and other local town centres in Bayswater, Lancaster Gate and Hyde Park Wards. Besides, as having both a major, district and local town centres, interventions across this range of high street typologies could provide a benchmark for a further roll out in other locations across Westminster in the future.

The team is currently preparing for a public launch and engagement from June 2023, when we will reach out to local communities and stakeholders for their views. This first engagement phase is aiming to capture input that will allow us to scope and prioritise actions to be developed and delivered in the next three years.

2.10 West End and Central Activities Zone

Soho

The brief for the Soho Monitoring Study has now been finalised and WCC are in the early stages of procuring a prospective consultant team to deliver the monitoring work to provide baseline data on traffic / movement, noise and air quality. On boarding checks for those that have responded to an expression of interest are currently taking place. As it stands the deadline for the return of tender responses has been set for mid May 2023. The appointment of a consultant team and the commencement of monitoring works will follow shortly after. Data collected from this study will be made available publicly at key stages within the project.

Covent Garden

Covent Garden Public Realm Framework has been published and 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 does not commit the Council to 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.

Following an 18-months consultation, Westminster City Council and the London Borough of Camden have decided that the Neighbourhood Traffic Management scheme in Covent Garden will become permanent. At the same time, key stakeholders in the area are starting to develop specific schemes for the area.

Oxford Street

The Stage 1 (feasibility) design for Oxford Street is nearing completion, covering public realm improvements from Marble Arch to Tottenham Court Road including select spaces off the street to provide opportunities for planting, seating, and respite. The design will be completed in Spring 2023 and provides the basis for public consultation during the Summer. Officers have drafted a detailed engagement plan which outlines the channels and types of communication to be progressed.

A business case has been written for the Oxford Street and Oxford Circus projects that investigates both the case for change and investment. The business case is currently undergoing internal review and will be presented to Cabinet on 19 June.

An engagement event was held on 27 February 2023 with the purpose of getting up to date views of the user experience from people who could find accessibility issues a reason not to go to Oxford Street. This was a fun and exciting event and the feedback from this engagement will contribute to outcome setting for the programme.

We held the second meeting of the Oxford Street Stakeholder Group incorporating residents, business groups, landowners and TfL. We also held a special presentation and walk-around with Fitzrovia residents to look at specific changes proposed to some traffic flows in that area.

Paddington Place Plan

The Paddington Place Plan is an evolving plan for the Paddington area which seeks to deliver on the Paddington Opportunity Area and North West Economic Development Area (NWEDA) policies.

Projects considered as priority for 2023-2026 are key to deliver on the objectives of creating safer, accessible, and more attractive routes and places within the area. Three key projects will be brought forward starting in Spring 2023: (1) the canalside route linking Warwick Avenue station & environs, Rembrandt Gardens and Stone Wharf to Paddington Station, (2) Bishop's Bridge & the Harrow Road Gyratory, and (3) Paddington Green Churchyard Gardens.

Greening Westminster small grants programme

The Greening Westminster small grants programme was launched in March. Formerly known as Open Spaces, Greener Places, the refreshed programme more closely aligns with Fairer Westminster and better supports applications from community groups. The programme's key aims remain to increase and improve the quantity, quality and impact of open spaces and green assets across the City, with £350k of capital funding to support projects in 2023/24. There have been a number of community workshops held to inform and support applicants and individual feedback sessions have been offered. Successful applicants will be informed in June and will have a year to complete their projects.

Town Planning and Planning Policy

2.11 City Plan Review

Officers have been working through and assessing all of the sites which were submitted as part of a call for sites and the Regulation 18 consultation, as well as other sites which could potentially benefit from an allocation.

That sifting exercise is drawing to a close and the next steps will be scoping what evidence is needed and starting to draft policies. A brief for a new Housing Needs Assessment has also been drawn up which will form the key evidence for the changes to the affordable housing policy in the City Plan.

Ongoing engagement with stakeholders will take place throughout this process to build consensus for the new policies and any site allocations before formal (Regulation 19) consultation on a final draft plan.

2.12 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 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.

A draft document is in production and officers are currently undertaking a period of targeted informal engagement with key external stakeholders to further inform this. It includes engagement with Neighbourhood Forums, Amenity Societies, Accessibility groups, Great Estates 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. The inputs from this engagement will be used to inform the draft guidance within the Public Realm SPD.

Officers will then be preparing to carry out a statutory six week public consultation on the draft SPD which we anticipate to take place later this year.

Environment SPD

The Environment SPD is currently under review and will replace the adopted version from 2022. It provides detailed advice and guidance on the environment policies in Westminster's City Plan. The Environment SPD is being reviewed to ensure we continue to achieve emissions reductions and wider environmental sustainability through the City's built environment, whilst simultaneously achieving targets and ambitions set out in Fairer Westminster, the Climate Emergency Action Plan and Air Quality Action Plan.

The initial scope of changes and alterations has been finalised and cover several areas: biodiversity net gain requirement and improvements to green infrastructure, improved flood risk guidance, further guidance on energy and carbon assessments, more extensive retrofitting guidance and more in-depth guidance on connections to district heating networks within the borough.

The next stages are the continued internal discussion and the commissioning of evidence bases to support development of the new guidance, and mapping of stakeholders for future consultations, both internal and external, on any proposed changes. This will be done while beginning preliminary drafting of the reviewed Environment SPD.

2.13 Statement of Community Involvement

Since the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was adopted in 2014, not only has the Council's planning policy framework evolved (such as the adoption of the new City Plan in 2021), but also new technologies have emerged, and we have learnt new ways of working with our communities. 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 in the Fairer Westminster Strategy.

The public consultation on a draft document ran for six weeks, ending on 14 March, and a number of minor modifications were made to the SCI to address feedback received during the consultation period. A revised version of the SCI has been prepared and will be presented for Cabinet Member approval and adoption in late Spring.

2.14 World Heritage Site

The Westminster World Heritage Site Steering Group, chaired by Westminster City Council, met in March, with 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.

2.15 Design Review Panel

The Westminster Design Review Panel was established earlier this year to provide an expert, independent voice to promote exemplary, sustainable design standards and to negotiate design improvements to major planning applications. The Panel will be formed of

20-30 members who will be independent experts whose observations and recommendations will be presented to applicants as impartial advice.

A recruitment exercise for Panel Members ran from February to 13 March, resulting in 250 applications, and shortlisting is taking place in advance of interviews. Successful applicants will be fully trained. Due to the high levels of interest for Panel Members, the recruitment process has been extended and it is expected that the first Panel meetings will take place in Summer 2023.

Smart City

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. Officers have secured £300k additional ERDF funding to connect an additional 100 businesses and are seeking an extension to deliver the scheme until the end of June 2023.

2.17 City Lions Social Engagement Pilot

Smart City, in collaboration with the City Lions team and the supplier Volume Ltd, have developed an interactive Augmented Reality filter launched on Instagram as part of a brand awareness campaign to enhance visibility of our City Lions programme, advertise the many opportunities available for young people, as well as signpost users to the City Lions sign-up page.

2.18 Smart City Operating System: Air Quality data platform

This platform collates disparate data sets from across the city, in one user-friendly, freely accessible place. It is one part of a wider platform hosting other types of environmental data, starting with air quality as a use case.

Defra awarded a £72,000 grant to the project to develop an app with a third party to plot clean air walking routes. Internal testing of reporting dashboards has concluded and necessary changes are underway to allow selected third-party users to review the dashboards and provide further feedback. Simultaneously, the team are developing an export file and API for third parties to directly access all AQ data we can share.