



City of Westminster

**Finance, Planning and Economic
Development Policy and Scrutiny Committee**

Date:	20 July 2023
Portfolio:	Planning and Economic Development
The Report of:	Councillor Geoff Barraclough
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- 1. No key decisions have been made in the period since my last Policy & Scrutiny report dated 14 June 2023.**
- 2. The following report includes my priorities and delivery progress since my last report:**

Economy

2.1 Fairer Economy Strategy

Our Fairer Economy Plan 2023 – 2026 was launched on 20 June at an event held at Somerset House. The plan 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 sets out the key challenges being faced 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 is the start of a longer process to co-develop a strategic vision for a fairer economy with stakeholders including employers, training providers and residents.

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 now the plan has been published.

2.2 Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

The West Fitzrovia BID ballot has been deferred by the Fitzrovia Partnership from 11 July until 31 October 2023.

The St. James's Occupier and Property Owner BID ballots are proposed to take place on 27 and 28 November respectively, with the declaration of result scheduled for 29 November 2023.

2.3 Westminster Investment Service

There are currently 28 live enquiries from business across a range of sectors that want to locate in Westminster. The highest number of enquiries comes from Retail, Hospitality and Leisure, and Creative and Cultural sectors. Within the last 12 months, two businesses have 'landed' in Westminster through direct WIS activity, and 45 via London & Partners.

Officers are developing a clear, focused and confident campaign identity and a new name for the Westminster Investment Service. Whilst the primary focus is on finding new businesses to move into the borough it is important to still speak clearly and confidently to those already within Westminster and those who are within the relocation process. The brand needs to speak to high-growth companies without alienating the micro-businesses that make up so much of the area's diversity and identity. The objective is to reinforce a reputation that Westminster is the place to be for sustainable businesses with an innovative and experimental mindset.

2.4 Employment

Westminster Employment Service

North Paddington 18-25 years Employment Needs Action Research

Paddington Development Trust (PDT), the Young Westminster Foundation (YWF) and the council commissioned research to provide insight into the disconnect between young job seekers in North Paddington and the labour market on their doorstep. The research was conducted from late January to May 2023 and engaged 18–25 year-olds living in and around the three wards of interest (Westbourne, Harrow Road and Queen's Park). Respondents completed an online survey which informed further enquiry through four Focus Groups and two 1:1 interviews.

The report reflects on the common themes emerging from the research and once finalised will be shared with stakeholders. It is anticipated that the research and recommendations will support the youth employment strand of the broader North Paddington Programme.

Connecting Communities Programme

Westminster Employment Service (WES) ceased participation in the Connecting Communities Programme, an ESF funded employability programme managed by CLF with 12 participating boroughs on the 30 June 2023 due to the end of the programme. The programme ran for fifteen months with Westminster Employment Service awarded Outstanding Job Start Performance as well as exceeding their job sustainment and education targets.

2.5 Markets

Berwick Street Community Saturdays

'Berwick Street Community Saturdays' diversify the weekend market offer within the West End, embracing and celebrating the street's rich history of fashion, fabric, and arts.

Stalls included upcycled fashion items, sustainably conscious brands, quality fabrics, live sketches, handmade crafts, wellness products, and jewellery. Priority was given to local Soho SMEs and community organisations (such as Soho Parish Primary), who occupied over a third (37.5%) of stalls of the inaugural event in April. Following a generally very

positive reception, the Markets Team extended the Saturday market, organising the final one on 9 September rather than 1 July as originally planned. 49 out of 67 participants respondents stated that they would be interested in returning for the other Community Saturday Events, whilst 50 would consider becoming a licensed trader in the borough which again demonstrates the success of the programme.

Raze Sustainable Bag Pilot

To help achieve Westminster's net-zero target, the Market Development Team has partnered with Raze to circulate reusable, carbon neutral, and eco-friendly paper bags to market traders for use in place of single-use plastic.

15,000 bags have been handed out to traders and customers on Church Street market, offsetting a total of 871,275g of Co2e. As part of the next phase, we are offering local businesses and Council departments to use the advertising space on our bags. On average each bag is reused 7 times over a 20-day period and is seen by 530 people, which is up to 11 times more effective at diverting web traffic than online other advertising methods.

Place-shaping

2.6 High Streets

North Paddington Programme

Good Growth Fund – Maida Hill Market

In April 2023 an intensive two week, on-site, engagement exercise was carried out at Maida Hill Market regarding the public realm proposals. 629 surveys were completed with users of the space, 79% of whom were local residents. 82% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the design proposals.

While there were strong levels of support there remain concerns that the anti-social behaviour issues that have blighted the square could continue or be exacerbated by some aspects of the proposals. Specific feedback on this was received from Karen Buck MP, the Maida Hill Neighbourhood Forum and the Metropolitan Police. As a result some design changes were introduced to mitigate these concerns. The alterations further improve visibility across the space by reconfiguring the planters and reduce the volume of new seating. It is also now proposed that work will take place in two 'phases' with additional street furniture introduced only once there is confidence behaviour concerns are being managed. Officers responsible for the design of the public realm improvements will continue to work closely with colleagues overseeing the development of a Management Plan for the space.

A Cabinet Member Report for this project will be shared in late July 2023 and work is expected to begin on site in September 2023.

Good Growth Fund – Queens Park and North Paddington Canalside

Successful public exhibitions for these two projects were carried out in May. The feedback received has been incorporated and work is progressing on the detailed design proposals. This will allow detailed construction programmes to be developed to provide firm dates for work to begin on site.

The tender exercise on the appointment of a contractor to carry out the canal wall repairs at Queens Park is in its final stages. Work on this is expected to start in Autumn 2023 with the wider public realm works for the two sites following this.

Wider Place Shaping Work

The Placeshaping team are now engaging with wider council departments to develop

projects that have been prioritised under the North Paddington Programme. In broad terms projects in this area are being organised under three broad headings – High Street, Canalside and Neighbourhoods. Further detail will be reported on this as projects develop and in line with the North Paddington project governance.

High Streets Programme

The Council has allocated £10million of capital funding to support the resilience and vibrancy of Westminster's high streets outside the West End. Following a thorough assessment of existing challenges and opportunities and historic lack of investment, Edgware Road, Praed Street, Queensway and Westbourne Grove were identified as the first areas for the programme to focus in the next three years.

Public engagement is taking place from June until August 2023, including in-person and online surveys and workshops, and pop-up engagement hubs in three locations. This will be followed by a prioritisation of aspirations and actions considering the findings from the engagement and alignment with the Fairer Westminster Strategy and Delivery Plan outcomes.

Greening Westminster small grants programme

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. Workshops were held to help applicants in the process, two on-line and one well-attended in-person workshop, along with 1:1 feedback sessions for more targeted support. 19 applications were received by the deadline on 9 May. Following scoring and review, 15 applicants have been offered Greening Westminster grants, 13 of which are community organisations.

Mechanisms for delivery are being worked through, with many community organisations likely to be offered support from professional landscape gardeners. Projects must be completed within 1 year. A communications plan is in place and successful projects will be documented throughout their progress and delivery.

2.7 West End and Central Activities Zone

Soho

Tender returns have been received for the Soho monitoring study from four consultant teams. Place Shaping, alongside officers responsible for Highways, Air Quality and Noise, are currently reviewing these documents and the technical proposals that sit behind them.

This work is requiring a detailed assessment with our term contractor WSP due to some differing methodologies having been proposed. There is a need to cross-reference the implications of these varying approaches with current policy requirements and the technical feasibility of supporting some proposed items of monitoring equipment on street. Officers are planning to report to senior officers and Cabinet Members on a recommendation in July 2023.

Oxford Street

The Full Business Case for Oxford Street and Oxford Circus has been developed and is currently undergoing internal council review. This business case will accompany a Cabinet report planned for the Autumn 2023 which will allow additional funding to be drawn down from the programme capital budget. These funds will be used to progress the designs for Oxford Street and Oxford Circus and cover programme overheads including staff costs.

Stakeholder engagement with residents and businesses has been ongoing in parallel with the development of the Stage 1 (feasibility) design for the Oxford Street project. This has involved meeting and presenting the Oxford Street project concept to NWECC member businesses (locally and internationally) as part of the discussion to secure 50% of funding for the scheme.

In July, the Oxford Street Programme will embark on a 6-week period of active engagement which will include a public questionnaire, open events on and near Oxford Street, and small group engagement sessions with key demographic groups. The feedback received during this period will be carefully recorded and considered for planning and implementation of future programme phases.

Paddington Place Plan

Paddington Public Realm Strategy

Paddington Public Realm Strategy seeks to transform Paddington's fragmented neighbourhoods into a vibrant, healthy, and inclusive area by rebalancing the environment to enable legible and safe pedestrian and cycle movement, and to create great public spaces. The strategy sets out an urban framework and programme of public realm projects across either side of the Westway, from Royal Oak to Edgware Road stations. The strategy document has been published in April 2023: [Paddington Public Realm Strategy | Westminster City Council](#).

Priority projects for 2023-2026

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. These key projects starting in 2023 include: (1) Warwick Avenue station & environs; (2) Canalside (Rembrandt Gardens and Stone Wharf); (3) Paddington Green & Churchyard Gardens; and (4) Bishop's Bridge & the Harrow Road Gyratory. Officers are currently engaging with key stakeholders and Ward Councillors to collect their views to refine the initial strategy for the areas and transform them into a solid project brief. At the same time, we are working with procurement on a route to appoint consultants for the design and further delivery phases that will follow. Projects design development should start in Autumn/Winter 2023.

Meanwhile Activations Programme

The meanwhile activation team continue to work closely with NWECC, building momentum around the programme and shortlisting units on Oxford Street to prioritise initially. Selection is based on the location, condition as well as the current occupancy situation. There are also a couple of units that are on the radar of the enforcement team. There is lot of interest in the programme as preparations continue for the launch of phase 3 in July with an application call out to brands to express interest to participate in the programme.

Town Planning and Planning Policy

2.8 City Plan Review

The first formal stage of consultation (Regulation 18 consultation) ended on 18 November 2022 and 47 responses were received from a wide cross-section, including residents, resident groups, charities, developers and businesses.

Feedback has been largely supportive of the Council's aims on affordable housing, retrofit and refurbishment, and site allocations, and officers are considering the responses be. Evidence has been commissioned to understand our housing needs and work is well underway to understand the evidence needs and policy options for the retrofit first policy. Officers are also reviewing all of the potential sites to assess which ones are suitable to take forward as allocations. The Council intends to undertake informal engagement on the draft policies and site allocations in advance of the formal consultation (Regulation 19) which will take place in very early 2024.

2.9 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 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 have undertaken a period of targeted informal engagement with key external stakeholders to further inform this. It included 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 6 week consultation on the draft SPD is then anticipated to take place in the Autumn, with adoption later in the year.

Planning Obligations and Affordable Housing SPD

The POAH SPD must respond to a series of commitments in the City Plan that it will include guidance on a number of issues, such as carbon offsetting and income thresholds for intermediate housing. SPDs can only provide guidance on areas of policy covered in the City Plan and cannot create new areas of policy.

Under the previous administration a Draft of the SPD was consulted on in March 2022. It has subsequently been redrafted in response to feedback from the consultation and Cabinet Members, as well as to align with the Fairer Westminster Strategy and Future of Westminster Commission.

The new Draft SPD has been viability tested to ensure the planning obligations do not make development unviable, and officers have worked with the Greater London Authority to ensure the SPD is as far as possible in line with the Mayor of London's policies and guidance. Following further internal steer, a new consultation period will take place in the summer months, with the adoption of the SPD expected in Autumn 2023.

Environment SPD

A review of the guidance within the council's Environment SPD was launched in 2022. The council has been gathering evidence to support guidance which goes further to meet our climate change ambitions. A new draft will be consulted on in early 2024.

2.10 Statement of Community Involvement

The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is a document the council is legally required to publish to explain how we will inform, consult and involve communities in drawing up local development or other statutory planning policy documents, such as the City Plan and Supplementary Planning Documents, and in dealing with planning applications and appeals.

Public consultation on the new SCI took place in January to March 2023 and the document has been revised as a result of the feedback received. We intend to adopt it this summer.

2.11 Design Review Panel

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 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. Panel Members have now been recruited and the terms of reference agreed, and details of both will be published on the Council's website in due course. The fees and charges have been approved and will be reviewed after six and 12 months to ensure they are set at the correct level.

Smart City

2.12 Smart City Operating System

The Air Quality data platform will collate disparate data sets from across the city and present them in a user-friendly, freely accessible place. Following its development, the platform has been presented to various external stakeholders for consideration and feedback. This has included the Forum of Forums, Marylebone Forum Air Quality subgroup, Mums for Lungs, peers across local government and Resident Panels.

The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive but also helped identify areas to be refined or addressed prior to a soft launch planned in late July.

The soft launch will focus on interactive Air Quality reports being published via the Council's website, with further releases planned that will include publishing raw data through a file download and via an API.