

CITY PLAN 2019 – 2040



City of Westminster



Delivered on Monday 12 November 2018 by Cllr Nickie Aiken and Cllr Richard Beddoe

Cllr Nickie Aiken, Leader of Westminster City Council

Good afternoon everybody and welcome to the Westbourne Park Baptist Church development.

I'd like to start by thanking Olivia Harris and her team at Dolphin Living for hosting us here today. Last September, Olivia and I were on the roof, topping out the building. The site has progressed significantly since last September.

Before Richard Beddoe sets out the detail of the City Plan, I would like to say a few words about the plan we unveil today.

It is a plan with people at its heart.

It is a plan with homes at its heart.

It is a plan with the environment at its heart.

Since I became Leader, I have made no secret of the importance of housing, and particularly the need to build more homes for people on middle and lower incomes.

That is why this building is such a great place to launch the new City Plan. This site alone will create 32 much needed homes for working people.

These will be intermediate homes and we have long trailed our ambition to see more homes like this built in Westminster.

This will help to grow the proportion of intermediate homes in the city from a very low base that is only 1.5% of housing stock across the city.

I am therefore delighted to confirm that within our affordable housing requirement we will be flipping the ratio to require 60% of affordable housing to be intermediate and 40% to be for social rent.

This is important for Westminster, a city which has been polarised between super luxury and social rent developments for too long.

Now, I don't want to steal all of Richard's thunder but there is one more commitment I'd like to set out on housing.

As many of you will know, the London Plan sets Westminster a target to build 1,010 homes per year.

However the national planning policy framework, set by Government, includes a new methodology for calculating housing targets.

We have considered this, looked at the numbers, run the sums and I am delighted to announce that Westminster will be the first London borough to set a housing target nearly 50% higher than that required of us by the London Plan.

Our annual housing target will be 1,495 homes every year.

This is a big, bold commitment from Westminster but it is the right thing to do and I hope all of you can support our ambition for the city.

In short, this plan is unlike any planning document you've ever seen before in Westminster.

It is not a long document that sets out what you can and more importantly what you can't do in the city.

It's a positive plan that sets a framework for our ambitions for the city and will allow more flexibility and pragmatism in the planning process. Something I know you have been waiting for.

I believe that this plan will help us to truly create a City for All, whilst conserving the heritage and neighbourhoods which make Westminster so unique.

And on that note, I would now like to introduce Councillor Richard Beddoe to talk through the detail of the plan and the journey he has been on to develop this ambitious set of planning policies for our city.

Thank you Nickie and welcome everyone.

Nickie appointed me Westminster's Cabinet Member for Place Shaping and Planning in May of this year. And since May I've had two priorities. One – Oxford Street, for which we published our big, bold ambitious strategy last week. And two – the City Plan, which we are here to publish for consultation today.

The City Plan we launch today is anything but a list of things you can't do in our city. It is a positive, visionary statement to guide the type of development that we believe Westminster needs whilst ensuring we safeguard our unique identity for those living here today and those who will choose to build their lives here in the future.

The plan provides a blueprint for a new approach to planning in Westminster. At the heart of this new approach are the principles of openness, transparency and involving local communities in decision making. These are principles that we believe in and act on.

So whilst today marks a significant moment in the development of the City Plan, we have been speaking to you and listening to your views on knotty subjects addressed in the plan for months, if not years. And that doesn't stop because we've published a document. Our engagement with you is only going to intensify over the coming months. I promise that everyone here today will have ample opportunity to tell us what you think about our policy proposals and so will anyone who has a stake or an interest in our city. I know I am personally looking forward to hearing what you all have to say about this exciting new plan.

Housing and communities

Nickie has already given you two of the headline housing numbers. 1,495 homes a year is indeed an ambitious target and I am very clear that this cannot just mean more luxury homes.

We want Westminster to be home to thriving, mixed communities, not empty super prime properties. That is why we will be restricting the size of new luxury apartments and introducing a new extra bedroom policy to make it easier for families to extend their homes so they have enough space to stay living in Westminster and are not forced to move out.

It is also why, I am pleased to announce that, in future, at least 35% of all new homes built in Westminster will be affordable housing. We know that the market can deliver this without any impact on the total number of homes being built. Nickie and I have both said before that hiding behind viability cannot be the free pass it used to be in Westminster. If a developer has paid too much for its land, the people of Westminster won't pick up the bill.

Building the right type of homes for people to live in is priority number one for this City Plan and I am sure everyone here understands why we are placing such an emphasis on housing. There is a national crisis and we have to play our part in fixing that, not just for the benefit of UK as a whole, but for the real people who have legitimate aspirations to build their lives and grow up with their families here.

Environment

People need more than homes to live in. They need an environment which supports them to live healthy, active and happy lives. So the new City Plan sets a fresh ambition for a healthier and greener city for us all to live in.

Poor air quality is now one of our residents' top concerns and we need a city that is resilient to a changing climate.

For too long, Westminster has been a city of concrete. This makes construction noisy and dirty, and the city less able to cope with extremes in temperature and heavy rain. Developers have told us that they want to bring new sustainable materials and construction techniques to Westminster. The plan therefore cuts the red tape that has previously been in the way to greener, more sustainable development.

Around 84% of journeys in Westminster are made on foot. To encourage even more people to take the healthiest of all transport options, we are proposing to both prioritise the development of the city's network of walking routes as well as encouraging more cycling. But we are clear that we can achieve this without the need for segregated cycle superhighways that aren't used for most of the day.

Commercial, enterprise and employment

One of the issues that has become most apparent to me since taking this role is the challenge Westminster faces in sustaining and growing the UK's economic engine room. Our economy is big, diverse and evolving. Westminster is a global hub for business, finance, creative and cultural industries and our productivity generates benefits that go beyond far our borders. That is why we are absolutely resolute that we need to create opportunities for commercial growth to accompany our ambitions for house building. This will mean that Westminster can be a place where people can both live and work.

But this is not growth for growth's sake. Although the Westminster economy has a global reach, we want to enable opportunities for growth which primarily benefit Westminster residents.

The new plan sets an ambitious goal for 75,000 new jobs to be created across the city over the next 25 years. These are jobs that I want to make sure our residents can benefit from and we will shortly be bringing forward more detailed guidance to ensure all of our neighbourhoods benefit from the opportunities created by new development.

The new plan also sets out the areas of the city where we expect most of the growth in commercial space to happen – namely the Paddington and Victoria Opportunity Areas, the West End district, the North Westminster Economic Development Area and our housing renewal areas.

Building height, neighbourly development and design

We will create the space for these jobs without the need for skyscrapers that would blight the city's skyline. Under our old policies, it was occasionally possible for the odd towering development to get through the planning system, sticking to the rules and securing permission, even if it wasn't right for Westminster. I believe that under the policies set out in our new policy, the days of one off eyesore skyscrapers in Westminster are over. Instead we will give certainty to developers and certainty to communities.

In the Paddington opportunity area, height will be capped at 20 storeys and in Victoria the cap will be 12 storeys. Furthermore, proposals for buildings higher than those already in the surrounding area will only be allowed when our new design, heritage and neighbourly development policies are met. These will apply everywhere in the city and are the cornerstone of this City Plan.

We are introducing a new neighbourly development policy which will make sure that all new development in Westminster protects the amenity of its neighbours, and bring benefits to the wider community. The policy will prevent unacceptable impacts in terms of light, noise or smells. It will consider how development proposals work with local character and the historic environment, how they contribute to greening and infrastructure requirements and how the impact of construction will be managed.

This will sit alongside six other design policies which will be our city's failsafe against inappropriate development. They will work together to conserve our heritage. But conservation cannot be an excuse to stand still. We want to encourage new buildings which stand the test of time and build the heritage of the future in the same way that our predecessors did in years gone by.

Retail

Our city is evolving in other ways too. We know that we are all living through a retail revolution. Our high streets are facing unprecedented challenges. As I have already said, last week I launched the start of the consultation on our ambitious new proposals to strengthen the Oxford Street District's world renowned status as a great place to live, work and visit.

Today, the City Plan brings forward a suite of new policies that will further help to create a level playing field with online retailers. We will give retailers much needed flexibility to expand their offer so that people can get on the high street what they can't get on-line – a place where they can not only shop but also enjoy a film, meet friends for a meal or go to the gym.

Soho

One area of the city that is already home to more diversity than any other is Soho. Soho is one of the most iconic neighbourhoods in the world and the new City Plan seeks to nourish what makes it so special.

And that is why I am announcing a package of new measures to keep Soho fabulous:

- We will protect small shops and restrict developers knocking two or more existing shops together.
- We will encourage new live music venues.
- We will restrict new big hotels keeping new hotels to under 2,500 square meters or around 35 rooms or less.
- We will prevent the erosion of character of Soho streets by discouraging the clustering of cafes, bars and restaurants.
- We will protect Golden and Soho Squares as well as St Anne's Church Yard.

All of this will help keep Soho fabulous for the residents and visitors of today and those of the future.

Conclusion

So, I'd like to finish by extending Nickie's thanks to Olivia Harris and her team for providing this venue. I'd also like to thank my team who have supported me to develop this plan, most notably Julia Corkey and her exceptionally talented planning policy team. In the summer, I sat down with the team and set out my vision for the City Plan. This resulted in a frenzy of activity to revise, redraft and hone down our thinking. I have to say that the team have delivered to the highest quality and with no complaint – not easy to do.

My most sincere thanks also go to Barbara Brownlee for her and the senior planning team's wise counsel, insight and advice as we developed the plan and for the work I know they will do to turn these policies into delivery.

Thanks to their help, I launch the consultation of this new City Plan which I think sets out an ambitious vision for our city. The policies we set out today will provide opportunities for responsible growth in Westminster. This means conserving those things we love most about our city whilst looking bravely to the future.

This is a plan for people.

This is a plan for homes.

A plan for economic growth.

But most of all this is a plan for all of Westminster.

I look forward to hearing what you think about our policies over the coming months, and thank you once again for Nickie and I here this afternoon.

Thank you.