



OPEN FORUM 28 JANUARY 2019 – Q&A Summary

This document responds to questions raised for discussion at the 28th January 2019 Open Forum that there was no time to include on the night. The document is being published on the Open Forum website to ensure that the council has responded to all questions raised.

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PLANNING

Q. HPEA - What is the Council’s medium to long-term intention with regards to supporting Neighbourhood Forums and the influence the forums can have with the London Plan?

- Every Neighbourhood Forum within Westminster has two officers allocated to help support them in the production of their neighbourhood plan.
- We will soon be publishing guidance which give details on how the council can support Neighbourhood Forums through every step of the process. It will also signpost potential funding sources for the development of your neighbourhood plan and other useful information.
- If a Neighbourhood Forum has any queries regarding neighbourhood planning, we ask that you contact neighbourhoodplanning@westminster.gov.uk
- Whilst it’s beyond the remit of the support the council can offer Neighbourhood Forums to influence the London Plan, there have been several stages of consultation on the London Plan which have been open to the public. The London Plan is currently undergoing an ‘examination in public’ in which neighbourhood forums are being represented by Neighbourhood Planners London.
<https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/london-plan/new-london-plan/examination-public-draft-new-london-plan>
- The council will continue to engage our forums on the development of Westminster’s City Plan.

Q. HPEA - Will the Council please clarify what changes are happening within the Planning Department following the exchange of correspondence with amenity societies last autumn?



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- We contracted the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) over the summer of 2018 to produce a report which was endorsed by Cabinet on 25 October (<https://committees.westminster.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MIId=4784>).
- Since the PAS report, public speaking has been brought in for all planning committees. The first planning committee with public speaking took place on 26 Feb 2019.
- Deirdra Armsby has been appointed as the Director of Place Shaping and Town Planning and will introduce further changes to the service in line with the PAS report in the coming year.
- These changes will be incremental, with changes in working practices evolving over time to strengthen the way in which decisions are made by involving officers at an earlier stage of the development process to shape proposals to ensure they maximise benefits for the city and people of Westminster.

TRANSPORT

Q. Jonathan Abro and HPEA – Can the council update residents on discussions with TfL regarding changes to bus routes, especially the number 94.

- We understand a decision regarding the Transport for London 2018 Central London Bus Services Review, which includes the routes mentioned, has yet to be made, but will be announced sometime this Spring.
- Although recent reductions in bus flow on Oxford Street have improved the situation, buses continue to dominate the public realm on Oxford Street. WCC has broadly supported TfL's proposals as they facilitate and complement the improvements set out in the Place Strategy. The detailed OSD proposals currently being developed seek to minimise the impact on passengers of the reduced number of bus services by improving interchange between routes, simplifying the network, and reducing the amount of "dead-running" (buses driving without passengers before and after standing).

Q. Domenico Strano and HPEA - What is the council doing to reduce the heavy traffic along Strathearn Place, Hyde Park Estate, W2 and the rat-running through the estate?

- The council will be undertaking an area traffic study of Hyde Park Ward this year. This will assess traffic levels and inform the development of a traffic management plan that will recommend things that can be done to address any issues found.
- We are fully aware of issues raised regarding heavy traffic on Strathearn Place and Strathearn Place will be included in this study.
- Please note to help pedestrians to cross Strathearn Place, we are now proceeding to put in a zebra crossing near the junction with Hyde Park Square.



Q. Richard Clayton and HPEA - Is there any prohibition on heavy goods vehicles using the Hyde Park Estate and, if so, whether it is enforced.

- There is no lorry ban operating in the area at present, however lorry movements will be surveyed as part of the Hyde Park Ward area traffic study mentioned above, and HGV restrictions can be considered where appropriate.

OTHER

Q. James Montague - Would the Council consider providing basketball hoops in some of Westminster's parks/public spaces? Currently it is very difficult to find a place to play basketball without paying for court rental at a leisure centre.

- We're always looking for new ways to improve our parks and open spaces so that they become a natural choice for people wanting to be and stay active.
- Giving people this choice is big priority for us and designing spaces means that yes, we can consider something like basketball hoops, as it complements our commitment - to give more people, accessible options to get active - very well.
- While we don't have any immediate plans, we're also paying a good deal of attention to how we can make use of spaces that aren't really being used for anything, or traditionally thought of as a place for sport.
- We're looking at how we can design and use these spaces - be it with outdoor gyms, multi-use games areas or perhaps basketball hoops - so that we give people more options to choose where and how they stay active.

Q. Rose Doyle – How can residents find out where the nearest homeless shelters are, so they can tell people they see on the streets?

- Reducing rough sleeping and its impacts on communities remains an absolute priority for us.
- Our focus is to offer people ways off the streets that ensure they do not return and to reduce the impact rough sleeping can have on all Westminster's people and places.
- Westminster currently spends a total of £6.5 million a year on outreach services and accommodation for rough sleepers, alongside wider investment, which includes a planned new, state of the art assessment centre. More information can be found in our rough sleeping strategy.
https://www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/rough_sleeping_strategy.pdf
- If you're concerned about someone sleeping rough, contact the national rough sleeper referral service, StreetLink. They'll make sure details are forwarded to local outreach teams in Westminster, and you can get an update on what happened to them. You can contact them online at <https://www.streetlink.org.uk/> or by telephone on **0300 500 0914**.



Q. Rose Doyle – For the last two years why has there not been a Christmas lunch for older residents and those on their own?

- We recognise how important it is to provide opportunities for older people to socialise and to help enable this we provide several activities within Westminster.
- In 2016 there was a Christmas lunch at Porchester Hall. This was a one-off event organised independently by our partner Everyone Active, on behalf of the council <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/westminster/get-involved/christmas-lunch-campaign/>
- However, there is the Tea Dance for residents aged 65 and over which we used to organise and is now hosted by the Sir Simon Milton Foundation. It takes place in December at the Grosvenor Hotel on Park Lane, is free and includes afternoon tea, performances and dancing. It is advertised in Westminster Plus magazine. <http://www.sirsimonmiltonfoundation.com/what-we-do-older-people/tea-dance-celebrations>
- There is also Silver Sunday, the first Sunday of every October which was founded in Westminster and is now national. There are hundreds of free events for older people. <http://www.sirsimonmiltonfoundation.com/what-we-do-older-people/silver-sunday>

Q. William Fearon - Could the fountains in Leicester Square be turned off?

- Water in a public space performs important functions. It is not only decorative but can be an ideal meeting and relaxation point. The fountain in Leicester Square was built as a memorial to Shakespeare in the 19th century, and is a listed structure.
- In 2008 a programme of work began, in partnership with the Heart of London Business Alliance, to redesign Leicester Square after public consultation. A new water feature using recycled water was installed surrounding the Shakespeare statue.
- The fountain and outer jets within are managed by WCC Parks.
- We can turn on and off both the fountain and outer jets; and do so on a regular basis to accommodate the needs of event, premiers etc.
- However, the fountain is not designed to be constantly turned off and on; to do so can, and does, cause problems with the system.

Q. HPEA - How will the Council work with our community to protect our local, independent businesses from the unreasonable rent increases being imposed by the Church Commissioners

- Westminster, as all Local Authorities, does not have influence over rent levels not set by ourselves.
- However, we are committed to investing in our services to support all businesses in Westminster.



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- This includes working through the City Plan to deliver a range of workspaces though to accommodate businesses of different sizes.
- There are some positive changes proposed within the draft City Plan to help support independent businesses – which we have included at the end of this document.

Q. HPEA - Short-letting continues to be a major issue on our Estate – will the Council please let us know what measures are being taken by the Council to deal with this?

- The council takes failure to comply with short term letting conditions very seriously and our Housing Standards Task Force team investigate unauthorised short term lets in Westminster.
- People using properties for short term lets beyond the 90-night limit without planning permission, will face enforcement action from the Housing Standards Task Force.
- This may include an Enforcement Notice on freeholders, leaseholders, mortgagees and any other person having a legal interest (i.e. ownership) in the property. Non-compliance with an Enforcement Notice is a criminal offence, and anyone found guilty could face an unlimited fine in the Magistrates' or Crown Court.
- Residents can report short term lets using this online form <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/nightly-letting-complaints-form>
- Residents should report any noise or other nuisance they believe to be a result of a short term let to 0207 641 2000 or use the council's [Report It](#) web page.
- We are continuing to lobby government on this matter with the support of both Westminster MPs.

Q. HPEA - We are concerned that air quality within the Hyde Park Estate continues to decline – what measures will the Council take to alleviate this issue?

- Air quality is the number one concern for our residents and with over a million people moving into and travelling to our neighbourhoods each day it is crucial that we make greater strides to clean up our air and tackle poor air quality for residents and visitors alike.
- It is going to take a wide range of measures to tackle pollution in central London. The ten pledges set out in our air quality agenda outlines policies to make a real difference - whether it's reducing the number of dirty journeys, introducing new cleaner technology or encouraging better habits - we want Westminster to be an example for cities across the world.
- Further information about what Westminster is doing to tackle air pollution can be found here <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/air-pollution>

Q. HPEA - Will the Council please update us on the Oxford Street District Consultation and other consultations which impact residents with regards to our interaction with the Oxford Street District including changes to access north of Oxford Circus?



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- The latest information regarding the Oxford Street District plans can be found here: <https://osd.london/>, you can also sign up to receive updates.

Q. General - What does our Council Tax pay for?

- Westminster City Council is a low tax authority. We've maintained a reputation for excellence in services at the lowest Band D council tax in the country.
- Further information about Westminster's Council Tax can be found here https://www.westminster.gov.uk/sites/default/files/160_3_wcc_a-z_council_tax_booklet_2019_aw_low-res.pdf



SUPPORT FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

The Westminster Business Unit – The Westminster Business Unit has been created to offer guidance and information on a wide range of issues. It makes it easier for businesses to navigate their way through council services and get the information and advice they need. It provides a single point of contact offering bespoke support.

Connect Westminster – This is a £2.8m European Regional Development Funded project to provide grants to businesses to help them improve their internet connectivity. Businesses can receive up to £2,000 towards their connection.

Supportive Workspace – The council is committed to creating the right environment for businesses to start and grow via our supportive workspace programme. Supportive workspaces provide space at affordable levels, offer a proactive business support offer and deliver benefits for Westminster residents.

Pop-Up Business School – The council is committed to supporting entrepreneurial residents to start a business. Last year the council delivered two Pop-Up Business Schools, a week-long course and a two-week course to support people to start their business. Over the two sessions more than 250 residents attended and of those, 20% made a sale during the course.

Skills – Skills is a major barrier impacting a firm's growth prospects. The team has several initiatives to support firms to take on an apprentice and delivers a youth engagement programme to help link young people with the job opportunities of the future.

Market Strategy – Following a successful market consultation last year, a strategy has been developed focusing on how the council is supporting markets, encouraging the next generation of traders and ensuring markets thrives. The council is supporting independent businesses and traders through highlighting training opportunities and support to grow their business.

City Save – This initiative supports businesses to raise their profile and helps them market to all residents within Westminster.