

Response to Westminster City Plan Consultation

Dear Planning Policy Team,

Re: Westminster City Plan Consultation – Vision for the Future

New West End Company represents over 600 businesses and property owners across London's West End—anchored by Oxford Street, Regent Street, and Bond Street. The West End is a world-leading destination for retail, hospitality and leisure, and increasingly regarded as a destination for global business. It underpins Westminster's economic resilience and international reputation.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to Westminster City Council's ambition to create a sustainable, inclusive, and vibrant city through its updated City Plan. The vision for Westminster must strive for economic vitality, ensuring that the West End remains a world-class destination for retail, hospitality, and leisure, whilst also meeting continued demand for grade-A office space. We appreciate the Council's commitment to broad, strategic engagement at this formative stage and look forward to contributing to a plan that reflects the needs and aspirations of the City of Westminster, and the vital role the West End plays in its success.

Since the adoption of the 2021 City Plan, the West End has experienced significant change. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, shifts in working and shopping patterns, rising costs in the development sector, and evolving national and regional policy frameworks have all created new challenges and opportunities. Despite this, the district has demonstrated resilience; footfall and spend have seen muted but sustained growth, supported by the visitor economy and an influx of investment into retail and hospitality, and increasingly offices. Our response is informed by these developments and by the experiences of our members as they adapt to this emerging environment.

The following are key issues that we urge Westminster City Council address in the City Plan:

- Maintain a retrofit first, rather than a retrofit only, policy, to meet flexible demand and support growth.
- Work closely with the Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC), and ensure local business objectives align.
- Collaborate with Transport for London and other bodies to appropriately regulate e-bikes and pedicabs
- Support the implementation of digital screens in a manner which is sensitive to heritage and wider streetscape
- Secure the West End's growing reputation as a global destination for business, and incentivise investment in areas of emerging demand, such as grade-A office space and mixed-use development

Retrofit First, not Retrofit Only

We support the prioritisation of retrofit over demolition and see this as essential to reducing embodied carbon and meeting net-zero targets. Retrofitting existing building stock preserves architectural heritage while delivering modern, energy-efficient spaces. To make this approach viable, the City Plan should provide clear incentives, streamlined planning processes, and flexibility in applying design standards. This will encourage property owners to invest in sustainable upgrades rather than pursue carbon-intensive redevelopment.

Nonetheless, there is a need for a pragmatic approach. Heritage constraints should be approached with an acknowledgement of the need for investment and development. Demolition should not be refused when it can be demonstrated to be appropriate. Viability testing and embodied-carbon assessment methodologies should also be employed with a balanced concern for heritage, sustainability and investment.

Equally, a retrofit-first policy must not inadvertently hold back economic growth or overlook the long-term sustainability benefits of high-quality new development. In some cases, a replacement building—designed to modern environmental standards—can deliver significantly greater operational efficiency, social value and resilience over its lifecycle, particularly in one of the most sustainable urban locations in the world, benefiting from unrivalled transport connectivity and infrastructure.

Alignment with Mayoral Development Corporation Objectives

The City Plan must be aligned with the strategic objectives of the Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC) and other London-wide frameworks. Westminster sits at the heart of the capital's economic ecosystem, and policy coherence is critical to avoid conflicting requirements. We urge the Council to maintain close collaboration with the Greater London Authority and the MDC to ensure that transport, housing, and commercial development policies are aligned.

Active Travel: E-Bike and Pedicab Regulation and Safety

We support the promotion of active travel modes, including cycling and e-bikes, as part of a greener transport network. However, robust regulation is needed to manage the proliferation of dockless bikes, e-scooters, and pedicabs. Unregulated deployment of the former creates clutter, obstructs pavements, and compromises pedestrian safety. The latter, meanwhile, creates unnecessary noise and disturbance, and exploits tourists. We are pleased with the serious approach Westminster City Council has taken with this issue, and particularly welcome the measures proposed by TfL, which include:

- A proposed ban on externally amplified audio, which will significantly reduce nuisance for residents, theatres and hospitality businesses.
- Mandatory licensing for all drivers, including medical and criminal record checks and appropriate insurance, to improve safety and professionalism.
- Annual licensing inspections, with pedicab vehicle licences valid for up to 12 months.
- A transparent fare structure to ensure clarity and fairness for passengers.

We ask Westminster City Council to support TfL in implementing these measures, which will enable active travel to flourish without undermining accessibility or public realm quality.

Vision for the West End as a Business Hub

The West End is a world leading destination for retail, hospitality, work and leisure. To maintain its competitive edge, the City Plan should:

- Incentivise the development of flexible, grade-A office space to meet growing demand.
- Enhance transport connectivity, particularly sustainable modes.
- Invest in high-quality public realm improvements that attract talent and visitors.
- Leverage the West End's International Centre status to attract investment

Digital Screens and Public Realm

We endorse the controlled use of digital screens as part of a modern, dynamic streetscape. Well-managed digital advertising can enhance vibrancy, provide real-time information, and support businesses to develop brand identities on the high street. Digital screens now play a central role in high profile destinations across the globe, from Milan to Tokyo, and help to drive footfall, deliver unique marketing, as well as helping to create unforgettable experiences. Policy development should aim to ensure that screens are sensitively integrated into heritage settings and avoid visual clutter.

Future Opportunities

The West End has the potential to evolve as a health and wellness destination, leveraging its emerging wellness clinics, fitness facilities, and hospitality offerings. Demand for these varied offerings is likely to grow, as the number of office and mixed-use spaces increases. Encouraging mixed-use development and innovation clusters will future proof the district, creating a balanced ecosystem of retail, leisure, and professional services.

There is also an opportunity to strengthen the West End's International Centre status within the City Plan, Westminster can unlock major domestic and international investment, support high-quality development, and secure the district's long-term global competitiveness.

We recognise that producing a new City Plan is a major undertaking and are happy to support by sharing data, insights, and facilitating wider discussion among our members. We look forward to further opportunities to contribute to the Plan as the process moves from scoping to policy drafting and beyond.

Best wishes,

Dee Corsi

Chief Executive of the New West End Company