

# Draft City Plan 2019 – 2040

## Consultation Response July 2019

### Part 1 - Executive Summary

1. New West End Company, the importance of the West End to Westminster, London and the UK economy and key growth factors

The West End is a vital element of the economies of Westminster, London and the UK with a GVA greater than The City of London<sup>1</sup>, employing 522,000 people<sup>2</sup> and set to accommodate half of the 77,000 new jobs to be created by 2036. The City Plan projects further job growth predicting up to 124,000 additional jobs across the wider West End from 2016-41.

The West End faces increasing global competition and structural changes to retailing. Its role in attracting investment and talent to London will increase after Brexit. It will need to accommodate 40% more visitors when the Elizabeth line opens and to retain the important mix of retail, entertainment, culture, commercial and residential uses.

2. New West End Company's support for the City Plan Approach and Objectives

New West End Company broadly supports the approach and objectives of the City Plan. We are, however, keen to ensure that the specific policies in the Plan do deliver their stated objectives for the West End. Our comments seek clarification on specific policies and an understanding of how they will deliver the Plan's objectives, as well as outlining how they might be developed further to meet those objectives.

3. New West End Company's four key asks of the City Plan

New West End Company broadly welcomes the emerging City Plan and supports its recognition of the importance of the West End International Centre and the need for policies that enable it to grow in ways which will retain its global position. We also note the City Council's analysis of the amount of additional commercial space required to accommodate expected job growth. We believe that this underestimates the required level of additional commercial space.

New West End Company has identified four key asks of the Development Plan which will most support the future growth of the West End.

4. Key Ask One – That the City Plan provides the level of flexibility of uses in the West End to enable appropriate growth to take place through the lifetime of the Plan.

Changes in global retailing and customer demand will require a more flexible range of uses in the West End.

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<sup>1</sup> West End Partnership Delivery Plan 2015-30

<sup>2</sup> Arup West End Good Growth 2018

We support policies 2C and 15A and 15B which support flexibility. However, we are concerned to ensure that:

- **The City Council is ambitious enough to allow new global formats which may emerge throughout the lifetime of the Plan.**
- **Further guidance through the Oxford Street Place Strategy and Delivery Plan involves retailers and extends to the whole of the International Centre (Para 15.17).**
- **Flexibility should not be restricted unnecessarily by prohibiting more than two consecutive non-A1 use frontages. The International Centre should be allowed up to three consecutive non-A1 frontages, as proposed for the rest of Westminster. The amount of non-retail use above ground floor level should be unrestricted. (Policy 15C3).**
- **Change of use from A1 in the International Centre should not be dependent on evidence of unsuccessful marketing of a unit for 18 months. This undermines the argument of actively encouraging complementary uses in the International Centre, to respond to global retail trends and makes the International Centre less flexible than the retail outside it. It would also result in retail units in the International Centre being empty and unsightly for 18 months before an alternative use could even be considered. But if 18 months' proof of unsuccessful marketing is required, then this should apply to existing marketing evidence in the wider local area, not just new marketing of the particular unit.**

5. Key Ask Two – That the City Plan provides sufficient new commercial space to accommodate agreed job growth targets with a supporting infrastructure.

The Plan cites scenario testing for the West End by Arup (2018), which projects potential for an uplift of 124,000 jobs by 2041 across the wider West End.

The Plan also references the London Office Policy Review estimate of a further 75,000 office based jobs in Westminster between 2016-41. This, it says, will require as much as 710,000 sq m of additional office stock, although the Plan suggests just 445,000 sq m are required.

The City Council already has ambitious jobs growth targets with 50% of the 77,000 new jobs proposed by 2036 being in the West End. These new employees will further support the growth of the West End.

The City Council recognises the need to create up to 2 million sq m of new commercial space to accommodate these additional job numbers. The Elizabeth line provides a major new commuter link. Good strategic planning suggests that the vicinity of new stations are best placed to provide additional job space.

The Arup Report on West End Good Growth, states that only a good growth scenario, which requires 1.3 million sq m of additional commercial space, will allow for significant net job growth of up to 124,000 additional jobs by 2041. All other scenarios, even those including an element of growth, are forecast to result in a decline in job numbers in the West End by 2041 due to continued loss of commercial space.

We welcome relevant elements of Policy 1, which support the provision of sufficient new commercial space throughout Westminster and Policy 2, which supports intensification in the West End. The Oxford Street corridor, with existing and a significant new transport infrastructure, should play a key part in meeting Westminster's demand for additional commercial space.

But we are very concerned that policies insisting that commercial developments include up to 35% of affordable housing will freeze development. Development will become unviable and if housing is for sale, the mixed tenure will prevent future development taking place.

We also believe that it will make an already challenging additional office target (445,000 sq m) much more difficult to achieve, as it will require over 1 million sq m of total development.

**We are concerned that the assumption that significant new growth can be achieved through extensions is flawed, because policies on height, affordable housing and viability will prevent delivery of this level of new commercial space.**

- **Height restrictions – the Plan allows for up to 4 additional storeys on Oxford Street (and up to 2 throughout the rest of the International Centre) to meet additional commercial space requirements. But Policy 42, prohibiting tall buildings in the West End, defined as over 30 m, prevents this from being achievable (Policy 42F says “Proposals for tall buildings outside of the areas identified in clause E<sup>3</sup> will not generally be acceptable”). We believe these two policies are not compatible. We suggest, that either the West End is added to the locations where tall buildings are acceptable or that the definition of a tall building is amended to allow for the additional floors proposed in the West End.**
- **Affordable housing in new commercial developments – the proposed requirement that net new commercial development over 1,000 sq m, should include between 15% and 35%<sup>4</sup> affordable housing on-site, could freeze much commercial development throughout the West End, because of the impact on the viability of new developments. We also have concerns about constraints on future development, if housing is included within the commercial mix, which will also restrict new development.**
- **The International Centre is excluded from this on-site housing requirement in the text of the plan and supporting documents, but this needs to be clarified and included in Housing Policy 10. If new developments in the International Centre have to include financing for up to 35% affordable housing off-site, this will affect viability which we believe will restrict the amount of new commercial development.**

**In light of the apparent conflict between the policies on commercial growth, tall buildings and affordable housing requirements, we would like to see the Council's evidence of the combined impact of these policies on the ability to deliver sufficient additional commercial space to accommodate the Council's job growth targets.**

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<sup>3</sup> The Paddington Opportunity Areas, Victoria Opportunity Areas, Marylebone flyover / Edgware Road junction and the Housing Renewal Areas

<sup>4</sup> 1,000-1,499 sq m, 15%; 1,500-1,999 sq m, 25%; 2,000-2,749 sq m, 35%

6 Key Ask Three – That the City Plan promotes a high-quality physical environment and encourages a dynamic range of experiences.

To attract international and domestic visitors this requires high-quality public realm and a continually changing range of experiences.

We support Policies 2D, 2E,2F and 2G, which promote a diverse evening and late-night economy, a more co-ordinated approach to freight and waste management services, with an enhanced public realm and transport infrastructure and the protection of the unique character of the West End.

We support the Council's proposals to put in place a comprehensive, world-class District Management Plan, fully costed and with resources identified, so that the West End can maximise the returns on the significant investment in the Elizabeth line and the Oxford Street District transformation. This is a key recommendation of the Arup Report.

7. Key Ask Four – That the City Plan defines the geographical extent of the West End International Retail Centre to enable greater policy flexibility.

We welcome the clear geographic definition of the International Centre as the necessary foundation for policies specific to the Centre.

We welcome the "Oxford Street Place Strategy and Delivery Plan" but believe that it should apply to the entire International Centre.

8. Other Policy Areas - Connection Policies

We support policies to make Westminster a walkable city, by prioritising pedestrians and reducing bus services and stands.

We support proposals to provide better cycling routes, but not on Oxford Street.

We believe that Oxford Street should be removed from the Strategic Road Network.

We support policies to encourage freight and waste consolidation.

9. Other Policy Areas – Environment Policies

We support policies to improve air quality in the area.

We support policies to prioritise Oxford Street for air quality offset schemes.

## PART 2

### City Plan 2019 – 2040 - Full Response

1. New West End Company, the importance of the West End to Westminster, London and the UK economy and key growth factors
  - 1.1 New West End Company welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the draft City Plan consultation undertaken by Westminster City Council (WCC).
  - 1.2 New West End Company is the Business Improvement District (BID) for the major shopping streets of London's West End. Comprising an Occupier BID and a Property Owner BID, we represent over 600 retail, hotel and property companies in and around Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street. We are a leading business voice in the West End.
  - 1.3 New West End Company has worked closely with WCC and others over twelve years to promote the growth of the West End and to address many of the issues that the District faces. In particular, we are members of the West End Partnership (WEP) which brings together the City Council with representatives of all the major communities and interested parties in the West End to plan for its successful and sustainable growth.
  - 1.4 New West End Company strongly supports WCC's plans to enhance the Oxford Street District, both in the City Plan and the Oxford Street District proposals. The importance of the Oxford Street District, and the wider West End to London and the whole UK, are well documented within WCC's supporting documents. The West End Partnership has outlined the direct impact of the West End on the economy, showing a GVA of £51 billion<sup>5</sup>, more than the City of London (£43.9 billion) and almost as much as the whole of Wales (£52 billion)<sup>6</sup>. It employs over 522,000 people<sup>7</sup>. The West End is set to accommodate half of the 77,000 new jobs planned for Westminster by 2036<sup>8</sup>.
  - 1.5 To ensure that The West End retains and enhances its global position, it needs positive planning policies which enable it to respond to the ever-changing environment in which it operates. The key growth factors are outlined below.
  - 1.6 *Increasing global competition* - if the West End is to retain its international status against increasing competition, both from traditional international destinations and from emerging competitors in the Middle East and Far East, it needs to evolve and invest in ways that respond to constantly changing customer trends and demands.

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<sup>5</sup> West End Partnership Delivery Plan 2015-2030. The GVA figure has recently been updated in the 2018 Arup Report on West End Good Growth to £57 billion GVA for Westminster "the majority of which sits in the West End"

<sup>6</sup> Note – The City Plan updates this figure and estimates that Westminster's GVA in 2015 was £53.6 billion

<sup>7</sup> Arup West End Good Growth 2018

<sup>8</sup> West End Partnership Delivery Plan 2015-30

- 1.7 *Structural change* - globally, retailing is facing a structural change with the growth of online retailing and the changing expectations of new generations which sometimes differ in the West from the emerging consumer markets in the East. Any successful International Retail Centre needs to appreciate and adapt to accommodate these trends.
- 1.8 *Brexit* - as Britain leave the European Union and loses the benefits it gains from being a member of the Single Market and Customs Union, it is vital that London continues to be a draw to international talent, investors and visitors. The West End is a major part of this draw, offering a lifestyle unmatched in many other global cities that compete for the same talent, investment and visitors. Not only can the West End not afford to decline, it cannot afford to stand still. It must invest and evolve to remain a vital part of the attraction of London and the wider UK.
- 1.9 *Elizabeth line* - At a local level, the forthcoming opening of the Elizabeth line, estimated to bring an additional 60 million visits annually, means that investment has to be made to provide a safe and comfortable environment for visitors and residents alike, when visitor numbers rise by 40% above the current 200 million. It will also require significant new commercial space to accommodate the thousands of new commuters envisaged.
- 1.10 *West End Mix* - New West End Company appreciates that it is the unique mix of uses in the West End, that makes it so special and attractive to worldwide visitors and investors. The scale, mix and quality of retail, culture, leisure and entertainment in such a concentrated space, makes the West End a global attraction. The amount, variety and value of commercial employment throughout the West End provides an economic bedrock that supports the retail, leisure and entertainment offer. The seamless integration of thriving residential communities throughout the District, provides a lively and human character that distinguishes it from soulless shopping centres. New West End Company recognises the importance of this special balance to the District's continued success and is conscious of the need to improve the environment for all elements of the West End's communities.

## 2. New West End Company's support for the City Plan Approach and Objectives

- 2.1 New West End Company broadly supports the approach and objectives of the City Plan. In particular we support:

A vision for a healthier and greener city – with commitments to improve air quality and helping to mitigate climate change through sustainable design and construction materials, moving away from petrol and diesel cars and consolidating freight and waste vehicle movements<sup>9</sup>.

A vision for the right kind of growth – in particular the commitment that “an exciting, more creative approach to retail will offer residents and visitors alike a complete leisure experience. The West End will be the place to go for leisure, because it will offer everything; a place where people can shop, socialise and be entertained.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> City Plan pp22-23

<sup>10</sup> City Plan p23

2.2 We broadly support the Plan's 10 objectives, and in particular:

Objective 2 – enable job growth across a range of sectors vital to the UK economy...

Objective 3 - enhance the West End as London's primary retail, leisure and visitor destination....

Objective 4 – broaden the city's cultural offer....

Objective 5 – enhance connections by... prioritising pedestrians...

Objective 6 – improve quality of life, climate resilience and tackle environmental challenges...

Objective 7 – Improve air quality, minimise noise and other polluting impacts, and reduce carbon and water demands by minimising detrimental impacts from development

Objective 10 – make the most of our historic environment, while encouraging innovations in building technology and improving sense of space

2.3 We are concerned that it is ensured that specific policies in the Plan, do actually deliver its stated objectives for the West End. Our comments are therefore seeking clarification on specific policies and an understanding of how they will deliver the Plan's objectives, as well as suggesting how they might be developed further to meet those objectives.

3. New West End Company's four key asks of the City Plan

3.1 New West End Company broadly welcomes the emerging City Plan. We are pleased that it recognises the importance of the West End International Centre and is proposing policies that will support its future growth as national and global retailing evolves. We agree with the Plan's analysis of the need for significant additional commercial space to accommodate accepted job growth targets to 2041, although we believe that this underestimates the required level of additional commercial space.

3.2 In response to both elements of the Development Plan, New West End Company has identified four key asks which we believe will have the most positive impact on the future growth of the West End.

3.3 We are encouraged that these have largely been addressed, both in the London Plan and the draft City Plan. In the City Plan, they relate to the Spatial Strategy and Economic and Employment Policies, but they also refer to the Housing Policies. The four key asks are:

- Key Ask One – That the Development Plan provides the level of flexibility of uses in the West End to enable appropriate growth to take place through the lifetime of the plan.
- Key Ask Two – That the Development Plan provides sufficient new commercial space to accommodate agreed job growth targets with a supporting infrastructure.
- Key Ask Three – That the Development Plan promotes a high-quality physical environment and encourages a dynamic range of experiences.
- Key Ask Four – That the Development Plan defines the geographical extent of the West End International Retail Centre to enable greater policy flexibility.

4. Key Ask One – That the Development Plan provides the level of flexibility of uses in the West End to enable appropriate growth to take place through the lifetime of the Plan.

*Background*

- 4.1 To encourage and enable investment, businesses need a planning environment that permits them to introduce new ideas and concepts, while conscious of the need to retain the unique character and mix of commerce, heritage, entertainment and residential communities that make the West End so special.
- 4.2 Global retailing and customer expectations are not only evolving quickly, but they are doing so in directions that are difficult to predict years in advance.
- 4.3 This means that for Planning Policy to support and encourage growth in the West End, to future-proof it against global and national competition and to protect and create more jobs, it has to be sufficiently flexible to allow decisions to be made throughout the lifetime of the Plan, that reflect the current and future environment, rather than being constrained by the past.

*Policy response*

- 4.4 We support Policy 2C “An improved retail and leisure experience that responds to innovation and change in the sector, including the transformation of Oxford Street”.
- 4.5 We also support Policy 15A “Proposals in existing town centres and high streets will enhance and diversify their offer as places to shop, work and spend leisure time”.
- 4.6 We support Policy 15B “A1 retail will remain the priority use at ground floor throughout the town centre hierarchy, and at first floor level within centres characterised by large format, multi-level stores. It will be supported by complementary town centre uses (including units and subsidiary uses within larger stores), that increase customer dwell time, and enhance town centre vitality and viability”.
- 4.7 However, we urge Westminster City Council to be ambitious in the extent of the flexibility of uses. We note and welcome the commitment to diversification and innovation in paras 15.7, 15.8 and 15.15. As an International Centre, the West End needs to attract uses that are both cutting edge and of a quality that will allow the West End to compete with other global shopping and entertainment centres, attracting visitors not just from the UK, but from around the world. We are aware that Westminster City Council states that Oxford Street is the nation’s high street. But it is also an international shopping street, which competes with the likes of Fifth Avenue, the Champs Elysees and the Dubai Mall. Planning authorities need to recognise the international market in which the West End operates and the need for world class attractions when considering complementary uses.

- 4.8 We would appreciate more clarity on whether future new concepts, that are not traditional town centre uses, but would contribute to the West End's global profile, would be considered positively, not just in Oxford Street, but throughout the International Shopping Centre. We note in 15.17 that "As the UK's premier shopping street, the impact of changes to the retail sector will likely be most strongly felt in Oxford Street – particularly given the existing presence of large format stores and the presence of multiple stores by the same operators. Comprehensive proposals for the future of the area that respond to these challenges are therefore set out in the Oxford Street Place Strategy and Delivery Plan". We would welcome further involvement in this, but suggest that it should apply to the entire International Centre, not just Oxford Street.
- 4.9 We do not support Policy 15C3, "development within the town centre hierarchy will not result in two or more non-A1 uses consecutively in the ground floor frontage of an International Centre". Given the structural changes within the retail industry, and the Council's recognition of the need for a wider range of A1 complementary uses to attract future visitors, we believe that on this policy, the International Centre should be treated as other town centres and no more than three consecutive non-A1 uses should be allowed on the ground floor frontages.
- 4.10 We do not support Policy 15D, which we interpret as saying that change of use from A1 in the West End International Centre will only be supported if there is evidence of appropriate marketing for a period of 18 months. We believe that the future of the West End International Centre, depends on introducing a wider mix of activities and experiences for visitors, beyond retail and that introducing this mix should not depend just on the retail demand. We also believe that 18 months of unsuccessfully marketing a retail unit, will leave an unsightly empty unit in the International Centre. It will have a negative knock-on effect on the surrounding areas. We do not see the rationale for omitting the West End International Centre from the WERLSPA Exemption. We believe that potential concerns over the loss of retail frontage, can be addressed by distinguishing between ground floor and higher levels and also by a version of Policy 15C3, which restricts the number of consecutive non-A1 frontages. We propose that the words "... unless the site is also designated as part of the West End International Centre or a CAZ Retail Cluster" should be deleted. If 18 months' proof of unsuccessful marketing is required, then this should apply to existing marketing evidence in the wider local area, not new evidence of just the particular unit.
5. Key Ask Two – That the Development Plan provides sufficient new commercial space to accommodate agreed job growth targets with a supporting infrastructure.

*Background*

- 5.1 If Planning Policy is to help create the environment that appeals to West End visitors, it needs to be based on a clear understanding of the District's key visitor groups.

- 5.2 The West End is a major draw for national and international tourists, and these are hugely important markets. But over 50% of the people visiting the West End are those who work in the District. 100,000 of the 600,000 West End employees work in shops and restaurants. The other 500,000 work in offices above and around the retail core.
- 5.3 These visitors come in every weekday and they form a bedrock of customers that underpins the success of the West End. To grow this market, we need more jobs and we need a shopping experience that encourages employees to spend time and money in the West End throughout the day and evening when they are not working.
- 5.4 WCC already has ambitious jobs growth targets of 77,000 new jobs by 2036, half within the West End<sup>11</sup>. Para 2.7 of the City Plan cites scenario testing for the West End by Arup (2018) which projects the potential for an uplift of 124,000 jobs by 2041 across the wider West End.
- 5.5 Para 14.2 of the City Plan cites the London Office Policy Review estimate of a further 75,000 office based jobs in Westminster between 2016-41. This, it says, will require as much as 710,000 sq m of additional office stock within the plan period.
- 5.6 Para 15.3 of the City Plan quotes GLA forecasts of the need for between 375,468 sq m and 467,811 sq m (net) of new comparison retail floor space in Westminster. Over the Plan period, this equates to 229,944 - 322,286 sq m.
- 5.7 Research commissioned by Westminster Property Association from Volterra, states that based on an assessment of the mix of future jobs and the space needed to accommodate this mix, it estimates that around 1.9 million sq m of additional commercial space will be required to house the earlier 77,000 jobs growth target.
- 5.8 This figure is a net figure and has to be in addition to the replacement of any existing commercial space lost in Westminster, particularly through conversion to, or replacement by, housing. Westminster City Council confirms this figure. In the Consultation Paper "Building Height", WCC states that "being at the heart of a world city, there is no room for a 'no growth' option". The Council continues, "we have to find an additional two million sq m of business floorspace to accommodate an additional 77,000 jobs and to make up for the significant amount of office space we have lost to housing since 2005".<sup>12</sup>
- 5.9 Providing this additional commercial space, will require a mix of policies including densification, greater height, better use of existing space and innovative working ideas. Good strategic planning, suggests that areas in the vicinity of existing and new stations (in this case, the Oxford Street District and wider West End), are best placed to provide significant additional commercial space.

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<sup>11</sup> West End Partnership Delivery Plan 2015-2030

<sup>12</sup> "Building Height: getting the right kind of growth for Westminster" March 2017

- 5.10 The Arup Report into West End Good Growth (November 2018), commissioned by the Mayor and Westminster City Council looks at different scenarios for future economic activity in the West End. It suggests that if the recent trend of net loss of commercial space was to continue, (mainly because of commercial space being converted to residential), far from being able to accommodate these ambitious job growth targets, job numbers would actually fall by 21,000 gross jobs in the West End by 2041. A “decline of sorts” scenario would see a fall in West End gross employment of 58,000 by 2041. It is only the “good growth” scenario (a net increase of 1.3 million sq m of commercial space) that delivers sufficient accommodation to allow net job growth in the West End of up to 96,000 by 2041.
- 5.11 In addition, the District needs the infrastructure that is vital to support modern businesses. The Elizabeth line is a major transport boost (and a commuter line bringing thousands of new workers into the West End). But, we also need to ensure we have high quality broadband, electricity supplies and other vital services that businesses need to operate efficiently.

*Policy response*

- 5.12 We welcome the spatial strategy policies in the draft City Plan including:

“1A1 Supporting intensification and optimising densities in high quality new developments that showcase the best of modern architecture and integrate with their surroundings, to make the most efficient use of land”;

“1A3 Halting the loss and supporting the growth of a variety of business space, to provide at least 63,000 new jobs”;

“1A6 Supporting town centres and high streets, including centres of international importance in the West End and Knightsbridge, to evolve as multi-functional commercial areas to shop, work, and socialise.

“1A10 Ensuring sufficient supporting infrastructure is delivered to facilitate growth”; and

“1B1 Growth will be delivered through the intensification of the CAZ, West End, and our town centre hierarchy;

- 5.13 We support in the draft City Plan the special development priorities, which proposes:

“2 The intensification of the West End Retail and Leisure Special Policy Area (WERLSPA) over the Plan period will deliver the following priorities:

“A. Significant jobs growth through a range of commercial-led developments, including retail, leisure, offices and hotel use.

“B. The realisation of growth targets for the area identified in the London Plan.

- 5.14 Our principle concerns are about the ability to deliver the 445,000 sq m of office stock (reduced from the 710,000 sq m suggested by the London Office Policy Review) within the plan period. We are very concerned that proposals within the draft City Plan, which state that hotel and office developments over 1,000 sq m will require 35% of the floorspace to be affordable housing on site (10) will freeze major development in the CAZ. Many developers will not wish to create housing for sale within commercial developments, because this will prevent future redevelopment of a key commercial site. It is also likely that the requirement to provide affordable housing will make developments unviable even if the housing is sold. If the housing is for rent, in order to retain the ability to redevelop the building in the future, this will not provide the returns necessary to make the development viable. We are very concerned that the policy risks prejudicing major new commercial development, as developers await future policy changes.
- 5.15 The 445,00 sq m of additional office space cited in the Plan is already a hugely challenging target, that will require radical policies if it is to be delivered. Adding a further 239,000 sq m to meet the proposed affordable housing policy<sup>13</sup> will make an already very difficult target almost impossible to meet (although we understand and appreciate the 15%, 25% and 35% sliding scale proposed in policy 10C1 will reduce marginally this figure). We do not believe that this significant commercial space growth can be achieved through extensions, for three particular and interrelated issues.
- 5.16 *Issue One – ability to deliver additional commercial space – height restrictions.* We note that the Commercial Growth Evidence Topic Paper assumes up to four additional storeys in Oxford Street and up to two additional storeys throughout the rest of the International Centre, in demonstrating that the Plan will enable sufficient new commercial space to be developed. However, we also note, in Policy 42, that building height will be restricted to no more than 30m in the West End. Given that much of the West End is already at or around 30 metres, we cannot see how these additional storeys can be added. We ask the Council to explain how the additional floors can be achieved within the constraints of Policy 42<sup>14</sup>. We suggest that either the West End is added to the locations where tall buildings are acceptable or that the definition of a tall building is amended to allow for the additional floors proposed in the West End.
- 5.17 *Issue Two – ability to deliver additional commercial space – viability.* We are concerned that the need to provide affordable housing on-site, outside the International Centre, will restrict new commercial development due to viability and the constraints it will place on future redevelopment. Further, if the exclusion of developments in the International Centre from the affordable housing requirement still requires a financial contribution, then there are also viability concerns. We are concerned that property owners will delay any redevelopments in the hope and expectation on future revision to this Policy. We do not see this risk reflected in the assumptions made in the Commercial Growth Evidence Topic Paper. We ask the City Council to comment on the likely impact of the affordable housing policy on the level of commercial development.

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<sup>13</sup> 684,000 sq m of new development will be required to produce 445,000 sq m (65%) of commercial space together with 239,000 sq m (35%) of affordable residential.

<sup>14</sup> Policy 42F – “Proposals for tall buildings outside of the areas identified in clause E will not generally be acceptable”. Clause E areas - “The Paddington Opportunity Areas, Victoria Opportunity Areas, Marylebone flyover / Edgware Road junction and the Housing Renewal Areas”

5.18 *Issue Three – exclusion of the International Centre.* We support para 15.15 which says that:

“While residential use of upper floors can help sustain smaller town centres and high streets that do not generate high footfall, they are not supported within the International Centres to ensure:

- they do not fetter opportunities for these commercial centres of international importance, to continue to grow and diversify;
- the scale of commercial activity in these centres, and their operational requirements, are not compromised”

5.19 We also note the statement in the Commercial Growth Evidence Topic Paper that:

“In keeping with the City Plan’s ambition to deliver 35% new affordable housing, developments within Opportunity Areas and key town centres will have a mixed-used basis, meaning that while 65% of the floorspace should be commercial, 35% will be affordable housing. The exception to this is International Centres such as the West End (Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street), and Knightsbridge, where growth needs to focus on purely commercial developments”.

5.20 We support the recognition that new residential uses can threaten the viability of existing commercial uses. However, there is no mention of this exclusion in the relevant Housing Policy, “10. Affordable contributions in the CAZ”. We suggest that policy 10A should be amended to read:

“In addition to the provision of affordable housing in residential schemes, contributions will also be sought from certain commercial developments in the Central Activities Zone (CAZ), **excluding the International Centre**, to ensure mixed, inclusive and cohesive communities.”

We seek clarity on whether this proposal excludes commercial developments in the International Centre from all affordable housing requirements (including funding contributions) or simply the requirement to provide the housing on-site.

If an affordable housing funding contribution is still required from commercial developments in the International Centre (at 15%, 25% and 35%), then we believe this will have a negative impact on the viability of commercial development in this District and will limit the level of new commercial development during the lifetime of this Plan.

- 5.21 We are also concerned that Policy 7 “Managing development for Westminster’s people” may prove an additional brake on commercial development, particularly 7A (Protecting and where appropriate enhancing amenity, by preventing unacceptable impacts in terms of daylight and sunlight, sense of enclosure, overshadowing, privacy and overlooking) and 7D (Not overburdening the capacity of local infrastructure). We suggest that the commercial importance and priority of the International Centre should be recognised by excluding it from Policy 7A and that CIL should be sufficient to address 7D.
- 5.22 Failure to achieve the additional commercial space required, would also damage business rate growth and therefore, potentially, additional financing for the City Council). The Arup Report suggests that the “decline of sorts” scenario would lead to a fall in business rate income by 2041 of £1.5 billion annually (-52%). In contrast, the good growth scenario delivers an estimated £4.9 billion of business rate growth by 2041, a 168% rise for Westminster.
- 5.23 Given the importance of both these policy areas; our professional concerns about the negative impact of these combined policies on future job growth and housing numbers; and the significant drop in job numbers and business rate growth forecast by Arup, of failing to provide the necessary growth of commercial space, we believe that this is such a serious matter that the Council should test the likely impact of the combination of these particular policies, on the future provision of commercial and housing space. In particular, we would like to see the Council’s evidence of the combined impact of the policies on commercial growth, tall buildings and affordable housing requirements, on the ability to deliver sufficient additional commercial space to accommodate the Council’s job growth targets.
6. Key Ask Three – That the Development Plan promotes a high-quality physical environment and encourages a dynamic range of experiences.

*Background*

- 6.1 If domestic and international visitors are to continue to be drawn to the West End, if employers are to continue to locate their businesses in the West End to retain and create jobs, and if employees are to continue to spend time outside work in the West End, then the District needs to be attractive, safe, clean and appealing.
- 6.2 This means that we need less traffic, high quality public realm, better air quality, high quality design and finish, more green spaces, good street management and a feeling of security.
- 6.3 It also means that we need to create a continually developing overall experience that draws people in, makes them stay longer and encourages them to return. This experience will have many elements including the quality, quantity and mix of retail and other complementary uses. It will include events and attractions, both District wide and within individual stores and businesses.

### *Policy Response*

6.4 We welcome Policies that support these aims, in particular:

“2 The intensification of the West End Retail and Leisure Special Policy Area (WERLSPA) over the Plan period, will deliver the following priorities:

“C. An improved retail and leisure experience that responds to innovation and change in the sector, including the transformation of the Oxford Street District.

“D. A diverse evening and night-time economy and enhanced cultural offer.

“E. A more co-ordinated approach to managing the area’s freight, servicing, and delivery demands.

“F. An enhanced pedestrian environment, public realm (including along the North Bank), and network of public transport infrastructure.

“G. Protection of the unique character of central London’s distinct and iconic places and heritage assets.”

### *Issues*

6.5 We are keen to see a well-planned, well delivered and well-funded Management Plan for the District that ensures the maximum return on the substantial investment both in the Elizabeth line and the Oxford Street District transformation.

6.6 We welcome Westminster City Council’s commitment to a comprehensive District wide Management Plan to be in place for when the Elizabeth line is open in the West End and the substantive Oxford Street District works have been completed. We are pleased to work with the Council to define what a world class shopping and leisure district Management Plan looks like, how much it will cost annually and how the resources will be found to deliver and evolve it each year.

6.7 We believe that that management plan is needed now. We should not wait for future developments. Many elements of the management of the West End are currently below the standards many businesses and consumers believe are required, of such an important national asset. These need addressing now, not in two or three years’ time.

6.8 The Arup Report recommends a “long-term sustainable footing for the provision of a range of “city management services” and infrastructure investment” and suggests an extensive engagement programme to support a management plan. It suggests that consideration should be made for revised business rate retention or other income such as tourism taxes. While New West End Company has concerns about the impact of the latter, we do believe that the now defined International Centre should, like The City, have unique funding policies, such as an element of business rate retention, that recognised the need to support a major national asset.

6.9 As a particular point, we believe that consideration should be given to ensuring that a greater part of CIL (and, where appropriate, s.106 funds) is spent on enhancing the physical environment within the proximity of any new development.

7. Key Ask Four – That the Development Plan defines the geographical extent of the West End International Retail Centre to enable greater policy flexibility.

*Background*

7.1 The International Centres identified within the Development Plan are qualitatively different from all other shopping districts in the UK. They compete globally for customers and investors. They are also great engines of the UK economy, attracting billions of pounds of foreign currency. Together they account for around 80% of all spending by international visitors on shopping in the UK.

7.2 As such they have the potential to benefit from policies that focus uniquely on them and their requirements, particularly to enable them to compete with other international shopping destinations. The ability for policy makers to target change uniquely on the International Retail Centres, without setting precedent for other areas, gives them flexibility to respond to global trends and, in doing so, enable the International Centre to adapt quickly to change.

7.3 To do this requires a geographical definition of their extent of the West End International Centre.

*Policy response*

7.4 We are pleased that the City Plan defines the International Centre. We look forward to discussing with the City Council how the International Centre can be supported through policies aimed specifically at its unique requirements.

7.5 We also welcome the introduction of the new West End Retail and Leisure Special Policy Area and its expansion from the former West End Retail Special Policy Area.

7.6 We note in 15.17 that “Comprehensive proposals for the future of the area that respond to these challenges are therefore set out in the Oxford Street Place Strategy and Delivery Plan”. As mentioned above, we welcome involvement in this, but suggest that it should apply to the entire International Centre.

7.7 Moreover, we believe that the opportunity should be taken, now that the International Centre is geographically defined, to create a series of positive policies specific to the International Centre, that recognise and respond to its global status and unique importance to the UK economy which makes it qualitatively different from all other retail districts. This could include, for example, licencing, policing and district-wide management.

7.8 We note and welcome the change to the northern boundary of the Soho SPA, so that it no longer includes the south eastern part of Oxford Street that is in the International Centre.

## 8. Other Policy Areas - Connection Policies

8.1 New West End Company welcomes the connections policies, which are largely consistent with the Mayor's Transport Strategy (MTS) and Westminster City Council's Local Implementation Plan and Walking Strategy. As the business community representative of some of Europe's busiest streets for pedestrians, we particularly welcome Policies "25, Sustainable Transport" and "26 Walking and Cycling".

8.2 In addition, Policy 27A2 sets out the benefits of reducing bus services and relocating bus stands to less intensively used areas by pedestrians. We welcome this, particularly in the Oxford Circus area, which has a very high pedestrian footfall and is London's fourth busiest station. Buses terminating and standing in this area is detrimental to the safety of pedestrians and restricts road space, that otherwise could be allocated to pedestrians.

8.3 Figure 21 identifies a network of cycle routes, which does not identify Oxford Street as an east-west cycle route. We welcome this, primarily for the safety and comfort of both pedestrians and cyclists on Oxford Street, which would otherwise come into conflict if this were a designated cycle route. We therefore encourage the early construction of alternative, high quality east-west cycle routes and restrict Oxford Street to pedestrians, bus services and access for servicing.

8.4 Paragraphs 29.4 and 29.5 describe a hierarchy of road types and uses of these roads. Historically Oxford Street has been a part of the Strategic Road Network (SRN). However, for many years it has been a destination for around 160 million pedestrians annually and a route for a small number of bus services, indicating that it no longer serves a purpose as part of the Strategic Road Network (SRN). Moreover, 'International Centre' status clearly defines Oxford Street as a unique destination, therefore in no sense should its function be as a route for the rest of London. Consequently, we encourage WCC and TfL to agree to remove Oxford Street from the SRN as it no longer serves this purpose.

8.5 Policy 30 addresses freight, servicing and deliveries. It is acknowledged that servicing should take place within the footprint of a new development wherever possible. Although this may reduce the available leaseable space in new developments, the alternative of deliveries and waste collection on the highway detracts from the experience and look of the West End, which would detrimentally affect its economic performance.

8.6 New West End Company offers a preferred supplier scheme for waste, recycling business supplies and personal deliveries to all businesses in its footprint. We suggest participation in this or similar preferred supplier consolidation schemes is added to policy 30A as follows:

"Applicants should demonstrate how freight needs will be minimised in an efficient, safe, and sustainable way through the use of *preferred supplier consolidation schemes*, Delivery and Servicing Plans (DSPs) and Construction Logistics Plans for the construction phase."

- 8.7 Policy 28 concerns parking standards. The policy recognises the general principle that the availability of parking can be a factor in generating car trips (28.1 and 28.10). However, the overall availability and relationship of on-street and off-street parking in a neighbourhood needs to be considered in the round. On-street parking is space that otherwise could be allocated to pedestrians. On-street parking needs to be based on current, rather than historic needs and we suggest a hierarchy in which on-street parking space is allocated according to the sustainability of modes.
9. Other Policy Areas – Environment Policies
- 9.1 It is disappointing that Westminster has been an Air Quality Management Area for twenty years (33.1) yet it still has amongst the worst air quality in Europe, in particular on Oxford Street and Regent Street (Fig 27). These streets have very high footfall, therefore high exposure to pollutants. In this context – and that building design can meet energy efficiency standards – the policy that major developments will be air quality neutral could be adopted as a minimum.
- 9.2 The benchmarking approach seems to be based on particulate matter, which is a local pollutant that can affect public health. We also encourage the adoption of guidance, advice and possibly too, standards to also reduce NO<sub>2</sub> and also carbon emissions, as part of an approach to good growth in the Oxford Street District – that is growth that benefits all stakeholders and communities. This would ensure this section of the draft City Plan is also consistent with paragraphs 33.1 and 33.5. Advice on achieving these goals in non-residential building design can be seen at:  
[https://www.carbontrust.com/media/77252/ctc765\\_building\\_the\\_future\\_today.pdf](https://www.carbontrust.com/media/77252/ctc765_building_the_future_today.pdf)
- 9.3 We support Policy 33B requiring Air Quality Assessments for all major developments, social infrastructure schemes and developments which incorporate combustion based technologies and welcome the priority given to Oxford Street. We welcome proposals to prioritise Oxford Street for air quality offset projects to benefit the health of the hundreds of thousands of employees, local residents and millions of visitors to the street every year.
- 9.4 We welcome the principle of Policy 38 on waste management but would welcome more detail and guidance on the scale of facilities and whether composting can be provided at the neighbourhood or District level.
- 9.5 We welcome Policy 35 on green infrastructure, open spaces and play spaces. Significant additional greening of the Oxford Street District can contribute towards supporting biodiversity, reducing the heat island effect, absorb some pollutants and create spaces to improve the experience of residents, workers and staff.