

2020-2021 PNF ANNUAL REPORT

This report sets out the progress of the Forum since over the last year. The report for 2019-2020 is available on the Forum website.

Neighbourhood Plan Progress to Date

By April 2020 we had completed the consultation on our draft Neighbourhood Plan before its first full consultation (The Regulation 14 Consultation). We had to consider the comments received and decide how to address them in the Plan. In particular we had to deal with comments from the Council in the light of its developing City Plan. In the event we were playing catch up as Westminster revised its City Plan and the Government introduced changes to Use Classes which meant that the detailed policies or the priorities for the central shopping and dining area as well as “Local Centres” such as Lupus Street needed revising.

We were able to get the plan revised by December 2020 and concluded a technical consultation with statutory bodies in February 2021. After some discussion, the statutory bodies and Westminster concluded that we did not need to produce a Strategic Environmental Assessment (as Westminster had done sufficient work in its own City Plan) and a revised Plan was submitted to Westminster in May 2021. We are grateful to Historic England for helpful discussions during the revision of the Plan.

Westminster has now concluded its Reg 16 consultation on our Plan and are about to appoint an Independent Examiner who will consider the Plan and the responses received in that consultation. The main purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan is to set out producing policies that must be applied by Westminster City Council in considering planning applications.

Westminster has produced a much shorter list of areas where they consider the Plan departs from Strategic Policies in the City Plan and we expect to have discussions about how this issues may be resolved, but the final decision rests with the Examiner if we cannot reach agreement. The key thing for us is the ensure that the vision is achieved and we have been struck during the pandemic how much the main strands of the vision, especially preservation of public and green spaces is important to our community.

Next Steps and timetable

We expect the Examiner to be appointed very soon and it will very likely be Jill Kingaby, who has examined the plans for Knightsbridge, Mayfair and Soho and so is familiar with the City Plan. She will consider the process so far, as well as the Plan and the comments received at the Regulation 16 consultation, including the Forum and Council's responses to them. She has to recommend whether the plan is consistent with National Planning Policy and Westminster Strategic Planning Policies. Depending on how long it takes, we could have a finalised plan by the end of the year, with it going to referendum open to everyone on the electoral roll in the Forum area by the end of March 2022. Assuming it passes then it becomes part of the City Plan.

Public Realm in the centre of Pimlico

The draft Neighbourhood Plan had already identified problems with public realm in Wilton Road and Warwick Way between Vauxhall Bridge Road and Belgrave Road: there has been a notable lack of capital maintenance; in places the pavement is simply too narrow and there is arguably too much traffic to make it a pleasant area for shopping and dining. When the pandemic hit, Amenity Societies and Forums were invited by Westminster to identify areas that needed help to cope with the end of lockdown and it seemed natural to put the area forward as it needed some help even before the pandemic.

We have been engaging with Westminster since then with the aim of getting a fair hearing for possible improvements. We consulted residents earlier this year and fed back the comments (suitably anonymised). Westminster is currently considering both the temporary extension of the current scheme (as it is for several hospitality schemes in Westminster, both those locally supported and those that are more challenged) and is also considering a rather longer term piece of work which while starting with the central area will consider other parts of Pimlico. We hope to update the AGM on this area of work.

Longer term/Other issues

A number of issues have been raised with the Forum over the last year and on which we have commented. We were consulted on the major planning applications by Vitcorp for the Wilton Road site opposite Sainsbury. We do not have the capacity to comment on many applications and before the plan is adopted it seems right only to comment where there is a clear and consistent Forum view that has emerged so far through the various consultations. We thought it important that the Forum's view on a prominent site should be given, so far as a view had emerged.

We were consulted on the Council Environment Special Planning Document and made a brief response. Addressing Climate Change is likely to be a major Westminster priority and it will be looking for contributions from all activity. It seems to us that Pimlico with its conservation areas and listed buildings presents serious challenges for retrofitting heating energy systems and that some early thinking by the Council is needed on this.

Finally in Westminster Planning, the City Plan itself leaves certain subjects still to be developed. The Council will be preparing a Site Allocations Development Plan Document which identifies potential "windfall" sites for development. There is a list of such sites in the City Plan, which includes only 11-15 Belgrave (former Civil Service College). The concern must be that this process might promote development at odds with the spirit of our Plan, but there is little that can be done about that, before the process for the Site Allocations DPD is started.

Steering Group membership

Sarah Moncrieff has been co-opted onto the steering group and will be standing for election. It will also be proposed that given the current state of Neighbourhood Plan development the rest of the steering group remains in office. Sarah first moved into Pimlico in 1982 and, since 1986, has lived in Charlwood Street with her husband, Nick, and as they arrived, their three children. Sarah works from home and was a founder member of the Churton & Charlwood Residents' Association and a member of its Committee since 2011. She has also done sterling work in consulting local business for the Forum in the last year.

Conclusion

When we started work on the Neighbourhood Plan in late 2016 and developed our Vision we were pleased that we had unanimous agreement from Forum members at the 2017 AGM. Those of us who have been confined largely to Pimlico in the last 18 months have surely appreciated its fine architecture of all periods and the benefit and quality of the few public open spaces. It seems to us that the Vision was remarkably prescient and accurate and of great help in handling the plan and discussions with Westminster and other stakeholders over the last year or so.

21 September 2021