

2021-2023 Pimlico Neighbourhood Forum Chairman's report

This report sets out progress of the Forum since the 2021 AGM and covers the period of finalising the Neighbourhood Plan and the Referendum.

Development of the Neighbourhood Plan

The Forum's draft Neighbourhood Plan was submitted to Westminster on 28 May 2021 and ended its Consultation on 23 August 2021. It went to an Independent Examiner in October 2021. The Examiner's role is to test the Neighbourhood Plan for "general conformity" with National Planning Policy, the GLA's London Plan and Westminster's City Plan. This means that the Neighbourhood Plan has limited scope for radical policies, but it can clarify and develop the general policies in the City Plan in the context of our area and our Vision.

The Examination was long and drawn out, because of the need for the Forum to respond to all of Westminster's comments on the draft plan – running into about 400 separate detailed points. Many of these were simply Westminster's drafting preferences, but there were substantive issues to deal with. The Examiner asked us to reach agreement with Westminster where possible and she adjudicated where necessary where agreement could not be reached. This means that some sections of the Plan have been substantially drafted by the Examiner, although the Forum and Westminster were consulted on her changes. This process therefore took much longer than planned for and the final Plan was only settled in April 2022.

The Plan has 23 policies with supporting justification and amplification. The principal consequences for decisions in our area relate to:

- a much clearer heights policy than the City Plan;
- detailed policies for any proposals for major change on the Wilton Road/Gillingham Street/Upper Tachbrook Street/Longmoore Street block which contains the Queen Mother Sports Centre; and
- protection of public realm.

There are also policies that strengthen controls on where hotels can be developed and on protecting residential amenity in the "local centres" (Lupus Street, Moreton Street and Pimlico, near the station) which are defined in the City Plan.

These policies should now be applied by the Council when taking planning decisions and they are supported by justification specific to our area and policies.

Referendum

Our campaign was launched in August 2022 with a mailshot of flyers by the Forum aimed at each household in the Neighbourhood Area which preceded the delivery of ballot notices by the Council to people entitled to vote. It's fair to say that for quite a

few people this was the first time they had heard of the Forum, its Neighbourhood Plan and the Referendum. So we had to use social media to correct some of the misunderstandings over who had produced the Plan and what its policies were. In the end on the referendum date of 22 September 2022 we had a turnout of over 14% of voters of which 93% were in favour. For such a large area as ours, this was a highly respectable turnout compared with other Westminster Neighbourhood Plan referendums.

Post referendum planning policy and casework issues

Since the referendum, we have been involved in those planning cases which, for the first time, involved the issues raised in our Plan. We have also commented on proposed planning policy changes where our Plan had useful things to say and where the referendum support justified it.

Experience so far suggests that Westminster's City Plan is not good at supporting the careful balance of commercial and residential uses and amenity which is necessary in our area and that planning officers are assuming much more effective enforcement of planning conditions than happens in practice when making recommendations on planning applications.

We also responded to the planning application by Vitcorp for its property on Wilton Road. However, this application was ultimately successful in spite of objections by the Forum and by Eccleston Square residents' association.

Warwick Way and Churton Street

The Neighbourhood Plan identifies problems with public realm in Wilton Road and in Warwick Way between Vauxhall Bridge Road and Belgrave Road and says that there was a need for improvement, if the area is to meet its potential of serving the needs of the local community. The Examiner strongly agreed with this.

We were instrumental with FREDa in getting the Council to set up the traffic management scheme during the pandemic in Warwick Way and Churton Street to give pubs and restaurants more outside space. Broadly speaking this was successful and showed what could be achieved to improve the area with a properly designed permanent scheme. We were disappointed when the Council felt that for legal reasons it had to withdraw the Warwick Way traffic scheme earlier this year. However, the Council has said that it intends to put in place a similar permanent scheme addressing issues which arose with the temporary arrangements. It will shortly be the subject of a Traffic Management Order consultation and together with improvements in Churton Street will be properly designed replacing the ugly temporary barriers with pavement buildouts and attractive landscaping. We have worked with FREDa in discussions with the Council and believe that the proposals are an appropriate way of giving the best

possible opportunity to improve this area for the benefit of the community and assisting the local businesses that serve it.

People

Clive Aslet stood down as a steering group member on 14 May 2023. We'd like to thank him for his work in getting the Plan and the Forum this far and for his expertise and experience in history and design matters. We should also record our formal thanks to all those experts who helped us develop the plan. Finally, all the current members of the steering group are putting themselves forward for re-election at the AGM.

14 October 2023