

# Agenda Item A3

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment Select Committee held on at 6.30pm Tuesday 28 September 2021 in Kensington Town Hall

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## **PRESENT**

### **Committee Members**

Cllr. Will Pascall (Chair)  
Cllr. Charles O'Connor (Vice-Chair)  
Cllr. Max Chauhan  
Cllr. Walaa Idris  
Cllr. Pat Mason  
Cllr. Maxwell Woodger

### **Members of the Leadership Team**

Cllr. Johnny Thalassites, Lead Member for Planning, Place and Environment

### **Other Councillors**

Cllr. Marie-Therese Rossi, Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

### **Support Officers**

Lisa Cheung, Head of Development Management, Planning & Place  
James Diamond, Scrutiny & Policy Officer  
Anna Geenty, Senior Governance Co-ordinator  
Jacqui Hird, Scrutiny Manager  
Tom McColgan, Senior Governance Co-ordinator  
Jon Wade, Head of Spatial Planning

### **Members of the Public**

Michael Bach, Kensington Society  
Constantine Gras, Urban Forest Petition  
Jessica Jones, Urban Forest Petition  
Paul Lever, Chelsea Society

## **Public agenda**

### **72 SECONDS SILENCE**

At the invitation of the Chair, all present observed 72 seconds of silence in remembrance of those who lost their lives in the Grenfell tragedy.

### **A1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Cllrs.Thaxter and Will sent their apologies.

### **A2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No such declarations were made.

### **A3. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1 JULY 2021**

The minutes of the Committee's meeting held on 1 July 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

### **A4. URBAN FOREST IN NORTH KENSINGTON- PETITION**

Jessica Jones introduced the petition and gave a brief presentation about the proposal set out in the petition which had been presented to full Council in July. This included highlighting the high levels of air pollution and deprivation within Golborne Ward, in which the proposal was focussed, some proposed methods of increasing tree cover in the area, and the benefits this would bring to residents.

Cllr. Thalassites thanked the petitioners for their input and stated his ambition to plant trees wherever possible, in Golborne Ward and across the borough. Officers had already begun surveying sites for future planting and Cllr. Thalassites stated his interest in continuing to work with the petitioners to explore the viability of the proposed urban forest.

The Committee discussed the petition, and the following points were raised.

Members expressed their support for the goal to plant and protect trees in the borough. Members spoke to the increased urbanisation and loss of green space in the area over time. They emphasised the need to listen to communities when navigating these topics and the preferred avoidance of the felling of mature trees, as the replacement of these with small saplings was insufficient and importing mature trees had its own environmental impacts

Jessica Jones summarised the goals of the petition and emphasised the need for the Council to work with the community and for departments across the Council to work together to help create an urban forest in North Kensington.

The Chair summarised the discussion and stated the Committee's support for the pilot in Golborne Ward and the notion that departments across the Council work together with residents to identify sites. He stated that there were some complexities to consider, including the infrastructure below the pavement surface, and other physical and financial limitations.

### **A6. LOCAL PLAN – ISSUES AND OPTIONS PAPER**

The Chair introduced the item and urged those attending to contribute to the online consultation. He highlighted the inclusion of the letter in the circulated papers from Andrew Boff, Chair of the Planning and Regeneration Committee of the London Assembly, and that the Secretary of State had recently paused the Planning White Paper, which may have future impacts on the development of the Local Plan. He further set out the Committee's key objectives in its scrutiny of the Local Plan which led to the prioritisation of three key chapters: Chapter 6 (Green Blue Futures), Chapter 7 (Homes) and Chapter 13 (Conservation and Design).

The Lead Member for Planning, Place and Environment, Cllr. Thalassites, introduced the report and invited questions and comments.

The Committee discussed Chapter 6 and the following points were raised. The planning policy within the Local Plan had limited impact on reaching the 2040 Carbon Net Zero Commitment, because it only had an impact on buildings which required planning permission. Members commented that planning permissions were also often currently granted without specifying the need for installing green boilers, instead using old-style boilers which had higher carbon emissions. Cllr. Thalassites responded that planning decisions had to balance competing and complex issues. The Local Plan hoped to address this through promoting the greenest possible approach to developers and providing a robust policy framework which both encouraged green development while being flexible enough to adapt to circumstance. Jonathan Wade added that this was a specific area where technological development was catching up with aspirations, which had resulted in certain choices being made to ensure that developments were viable. He stated that this was a changing picture, and the Council did now have a policy which requires all major developments to be carbon net zero. The challenges lay in achieving this in practice and on site, rather than partially achieving carbon net zero through local offsetting. The Council were looking to increase the proportion of developments in which carbon net zero is achieved on-site.

Members asked about the possibility of protection of private green space, i.e. gardens, from developments such as extensions or outbuildings. Some members took the view that existing policy did not go far enough to protect trees in the Borough, as despite the Council's aspirations to protect and plant, in practice these do not come into fruition and often do not reflect resident wishes.

The Chair emphasised that getting to net carbon zero 2030/2040 was not a Council objective, but a commitment voted in by the full council, and this has implications to how it should be represented in policy documents. He further suggested that officers look at the idea that tariffs levied to developers for not meeting carbon net zero should not be a one-off payment, rather be an annual payment to encourage changes in behaviour.

The Committee discussed how biodiversity on brownfield sites which are due to be developed will be retained and protected. Cllr Thalassites confirmed that wherever possible biodiversity will be protected and enhanced. Jonathan Wade added that sites are required to have a biodiversity net gain. The Committee requested that an annual measurement of biodiversity across the Borough is presented to the Committee on a regular basis to evaluate progress.

*Action by: Jonathan Wade, Head of Spatial Planning*

Paul Lever, Chair of the Chelsea Society's Planning Committee, presented to the Committee their comments and priorities for the Local Plan. These included:

- Shopping, work, and housing habits and priorities are changing. Any plans or policies being written currently should have flexibility built into them to allow for such changes.

- Much of Chelsea is in a conservation area. Maintaining and enhancing the character of these is a key priority, which includes protecting the low-rise nature of Chelsea's cityscape.
- He noted that in paragraph 13.8 of the Local Plan the definition of tall buildings had been revised, which has implications for the above.
- He stated that whilst more housing was needed, it was not the single key priority for Chelsea. He emphasised that there is currently a shortage of *affordable* housing which should be focused upon.

Michael Bach from the Kensington Society, presented to the Committee their thoughts on the Local Plan. These included:

- He stated that, like the Chelsea Society, the Kensington Society were also interested in the topics of conservation and housing.
- He drew the Committee's attention to the current uncertain position of the Government's Planning for the Future white paper which could pose major changes to the planning system.
- He noted that the Local Plan must respond to both the London Plan and the changes ongoing at a national level in terms of planning policy. He stated that National Planning Policy Framework includes a need for developments to contribute to sustainable development, address social progress, and increase economic wellbeing and environmental protection. Such developments need to be aspirational and deliverable. He expressed concern at the direction the Local Plan Review is taking, as it would fail to meet some of these criteria. He stated that the strategy as presented is not sustainable, sufficiently aspirational, and not deliverable.
- He further expressed concern about the scale of development proposed as unachievable and unbalanced, partly due to the focus on increased densities brought about by tall buildings. He stated the environmental damage, community harm, and unsustainable communities posed by such developments. He emphasised that there should be a stronger focus on sustainable development and that officers should look at whether, and if so where, tall buildings would be suitable for this.
- He emphasised that residents should want and be comfortable with any developments being proposed, in line with commitments in the Council Plan to put local people at the heart of decision-making processes.

Cllr. Thalassites thanked Paul Lever and Michael Bach for their input. He stated his support for preserving the character of the Borough, especially avoiding the construction of tall buildings the riverside area. He drew the Committee's attention to the commitment in the Local Plan for a new riverside park in Chelsea to evidence how the Plan included a range of commitments and policies departed from housing. He emphasised that there is a focus within the Local Plan upon affordable housing and that officers and the societies share similar goals of preserving amenities and continuing a broadly low rise borough. He acknowledged the current uncertainty surrounding the Planning White Paper

and stated that policies and visions would need to be adapted in line with any changes going forward.

The Chair moved on to Chapter 13 of the Local Plan, which looks at Conservation and Design.

The Committee discussed the potential for height limits to be imposed on tall buildings in non-conservation areas. Jonathan Wade responded to explain that the GLA have set a benchmark in the London Plan for when the tall buildings policy will apply, which is 18 metres or 6 storeys. Officers have considered the height of the existing townscape in the Borough to see where that benchmark would be appropriate so that policies could reflect the context of the immediate area. A different benchmark, based on context, could be applicable in certain parts of the borough where the context is already higher than 6 storeys. Future planning applications would be assessed against the new policy.

The Committee discussed how the Local Plan poses a difficult balance between meeting housing targets and the housing need in the Borough with other competing factors. Jonathan Wade clarified that housing targets are tracked across a three year rolling period rather than a yearly one, and that the Borough housing target is capacity based. Officers have worked with the GLA to reduce the previous target based on the realistic capacity of the Borough for new homes. He further stated that through government and London Plan based guidance, the Council is required to optimise the density of sites, so that they respond to the specific context of the site such as transport accessibility, whilst creating an environment in which people desire to live.

Some Members emphasised the commitments made following the Grenfell tragedy to involve local people at heart of decision making, including the planning process. They expressed that some residents feel this is not being adhered to.

The Chair summarised the discussion. He stated that the Committee intends to draw further evidence from the community and other resources such as Member of the London Assembly Andrew Boff and the London Assembly Select Committee on this matter before making recommendations and will respond to the consultation on the Local Plan.

*Action by: James Diamond*

He surmised that the Committee support the aspirations set out in Chapter 6 that will help enable the Borough to achieve its 2030 and 2040 carbon net zero commitments. In principle, the Committee support the options set out in Chapter 7 to allow the Council to reach the housing target. He stated that the Lead Member should work closely with the community to discuss concerns about the construction of tall buildings in the Borough and that maintaining the low-rise nature of the Borough should be a priority.

## **A7 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair noted the report and drew the Committee's attention to the programming of agenda topics planned for the coming year. He stated that the

Committee were attending a visit to the Lancaster West Estate the following week to review some of the green developments being undertaken there.

He asked the Lead Member to provide a list of his priorities for the coming year to aid with further planning.

*Action by: Cllr. Thalassites*

**A8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**

There were no urgent matters.

**EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

There were no matters requiring the exclusion of the press and public from the meeting.

The meeting ended at 8.50pm.

Chair