

Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Plan sets priorities for the next 15 Years

By Nick Bailey

The FitzWest Neighbourhood Forum was set up in 2015 and one of its main functions is to prepare a neighbourhood plan for that part of Fitzrovia lying west of Cleveland Street and Charlotte Street as far south as Oxford Street in the City of Westminster. The Marylebone Road is the northern boundary. The Forum is made up of representatives of local residents, businesses and ward councillors from West End and Marylebone High Street wards.

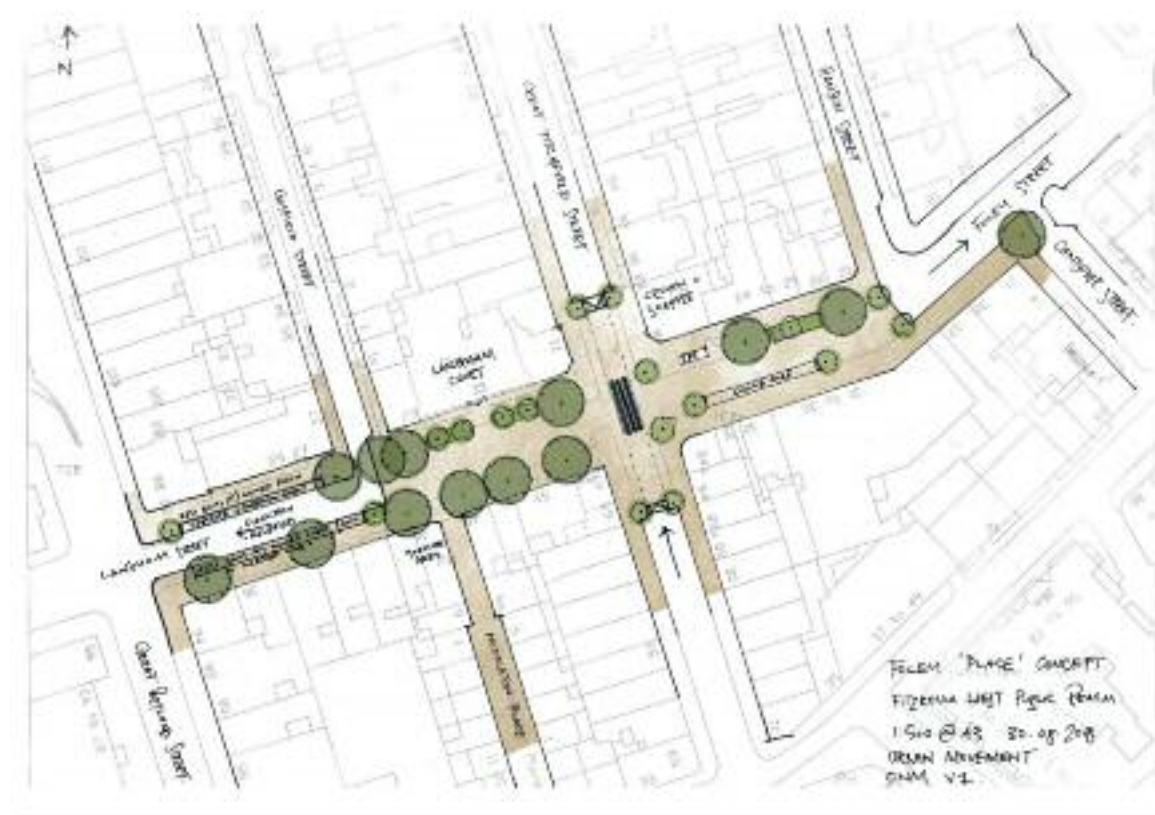
The plan has to pass through a number of stages before it becomes part of the statutory planning process and is then used as an important guide when the Council decides on planning applications. It also enables us to set out our priorities and inform officers and councillors about what improvements are needed in the future.

FitzWest is an urban village with a mixture of residents and businesses that makes it such an attractive place to live and work. There are also many thousands of workers and visitors travelling to and from the area every day. Because of this mixture, Westminster has decided we are a 'business neighbourhood'. This means that we must pay special attention to the needs of local businesses, as in the final stage the plan has to be approved by a referendum of both residents and businesses.

So what is the plan proposing? We have five main objectives:

The first is to preserve the mix of uses in the area and increase the amount of affordable housing.

Large parts of the area lie within Conservation Areas and there are many listed buildings and other attractive or historic buildings that need to be protected and not overshadowed by inappropriate high-rise developments. Where new development is proposed it should respect the scale, quality of design and mix of uses in the area. In line with Council policy, new housing development of 10 or more flats should provide at least 35% of affordable housing which should be built on site and not in another part of the borough. In the past developers have been able to make a payment to avoid this stipulation. Very high quality architecture and an attractive street frontage are essential.



Left: Langham Street and Foley Street public realm improvements. One of several ideas for improving greening, creating public space, and removing the dominance of motor traffic.

FitzWest is renowned for its arts, cultural and leisure provision but these should be well managed and considerate to neighbours. We want to restrict large hotels and nightclubs to the area south of Mortimer Street, which has fewer residents. Community facilities, such as the Fitzrovia Centre, All Souls' school, All Souls' Clubhouse and the nursery in Holcroft Court, should be protected and, where possible, increased provision should be provided to meet all needs.

The second is protecting and increasing green and open space: FitzWest has long suffered from a lack of green and open space, including play space for young children. In 2018 the Forum commissioned a study which identified a number of streets which could be closed to traffic and landscaped to provide sitting out areas and play space without the constant danger of passing traffic and pollution.

Riding House Street near All Souls' school, parts of Foley Street and Langham Street are high priorities for this treatment. There are many other streets where traffic could be redirected and the street could be landscaped for sitting areas and play space. Too many streets are narrow but often full of parked cars, making it difficult for pedestrians and dangerous for children and cyclists. We want to see the City Council tak-

ing a lead in implementing these proposals.

The Forum has also promoted a scheme to 'green' the pavement area on the west side of Holcroft Court and wants to see an increased use of green roofs and walls, tree planting and planters for use by residents.

Our third is about supporting small businesses: As part of the Central Activities Zone, FitzWest provides a home for over 2000 businesses employing a total of almost 40,000 people. It has an extremely dynamic economy ranging from the small shop or specialist consultancies, to creative industries and global companies such as Estée Lauder and Facebook.

FitzWest has traditionally housed many craftsmen, shops, galleries, restaurants and specialist companies which depend on easy access to the BBC and other media companies, or department stores in Oxford Street or Tottenham Court Road. We wish to see this mix sustained and in particular, increased provision of appropriate workspaces for small, start-up companies.

One of the particular attractions of FitzWest is the range of shops, cafes and restaurants on streets such as Great Titchfield Street. While shops have been declining in number throughout London, there are other uses which can take their place and en-

sure the streets remain vibrant and provide the range of services those living and working in the area need. This equally applies to Oxford Street where some major retailers are closing or using less floor space.

The fourth objective is protecting and improving environmental standards: FitzWest experiences some of the lowest air quality standards in London and the Forum strongly supports any measures to reduce unnecessary through traffic and to rationalize the buses and deliveries by mainly diesel vehicles.

As well as vehicles going electric, buildings need to be more energy efficient and sustainable through reducing the emission of greenhouse gases. These changes can also play a part in limiting the 'heat island effect' whereby temperatures in central London are significantly higher in the summer than surrounding areas.

The final objective is improving mobility and transport: As already noted, the plan aims to reduce through traffic while enabling existing businesses to gain access to their premises. The emphasis is very much on improving provision for walking and cycling and encouraging greater use of electric vehicles for deliveries and use by residents.

The opening of the Elizabeth Line (Crossrail) will bring increased numbers of pedestrians

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onto Oxford Street, as well as increased pressures for expanding and redeveloping property in the area.

Ideally we'd like a full and comprehensive review of traffic flows on both the Westminster and Camden sides of the boundary with a view to a comprehensive plan for traffic calming and improved air quality.

The draft plan, and supporting documentation, is available to view on the FitzWest website and we warmly invite residents, local businesses and visitors to read it and send us their comments and feedback. It also includes an appendix to promote other ideas by which the area might be improved but which cannot be directly influenced by the planning process. The plan and other documents are available here:

<http://fitzwest.org/wordpress/draft-plan/>

FitzWest Neighbourhood Forum consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan and AGM, Monday 13 May, Sainsbury Wellcome Centre, 25 Howland Street, W1T 4JG. 13.30 onwards: Consultation on Neighbourhood Plan. 18.00 AGM. Presentation on Neighbourhood Plan followed by guest speaker from the Westminster Council on air quality. Refreshments will be available. We look forward to seeing you.