

# Soho Neighbourhood Forum

Summer 2019

## Executive Summary

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This plan is a neighbourhood plan using the powers created by the Localism Act 2011 to give people living and working in an area such as Soho the right to draw up their own plans. The Soho Neighbourhood Area (SNA) was decided upon in May 2013 and the Soho Neighbourhood Forum was designated on 25th July 2014 as a business neighbourhood forum, which is led by a Forum Steering Group (FSG) of 50/50 residents and businesses.

The FSG quickly agreed a vision for the Forum to work towards. Soho is a very diverse and intensively used area with many competing interests. It was decided that the best way to proceed was 'bottom up'. In other words, to consult first to identify what people felt the key issues to be. Then devise some very simple objectives (which we called aspirations) to address those key issues. Check back with those consulted plus a range of key stakeholders whether those aspirations were widely supported and gauge the level of support for each. Then proceed with detailed policy work built on that foundation of community views. That is what we have done.

Some of the ideas that came forward in the process were just not matters that can be covered in a neighbourhood plan, so we have produced a non-statutory (i.e. not legally binding) set of recommendations and projects to put forward to bodies like Westminster City Council and Transport for London, which we ask them to carefully consider to help achieve the overall vision for Soho.

### **What Did The Public Consultation Reveal?**

Our initial working parties established that there were 17 key issues. Our first survey in 2016 received 993 responses to those issues showing us that these issues were of widespread concern. We then crafted 19 aspirations suggesting how we would address these key issues. And carried out a follow up survey in 2017. We asked those responding to indicate their level of support for each on a scale of 1 to 10. We received 542 responses and over 3,000 individual comments. The most strongly supported aspiration was to protect the heritage and culture of Soho. This was closely followed by a desire to control the size and scale of development, followed in turn by a desire to protect and enhance Soho's creative industries and to improve air quality. The lowest level of support was for our aspiration to improve facilities for cyclists.

This extensive early public consultation has produced other positive results. One early 'flagship' policy proposal was to declare Soho a special policy area (SPA), an idea seized on and supported by a wide range of people. We were very pleasantly surprised to see that Westminster in its draft City Plan 2019-40, formally published on 19th June 2019, has taken that idea and fleshed it out in a strong set of policies to help keep Soho special. Similarly, our proposals on making development more 'neighbourly', protecting galleries and the arts, greening, protecting social and community uses, making residential development car-free and securing improved digital infrastructure have all been reflected in the City Plan. The Forum is grateful that the Council has been in listening mode, both to us and others. It means a bit less content in our plan now but welcome new strong policies in theirs.

### What Does The Plan Contain?

There are a series of policies supported by a reasoned justification, which either quotes or gives a reference to the evidence that supports the policy. There are 5 sections. Culture and Heritage, Commercial Activity, Entertainment and the Night Time Economy, Housing and Environment.

### Summary of Policies

#### 1. Culture and Heritage

Tall buildings will not be supported. Development proposals must respect the predominant size and scale of the conservation area with any proposals for significantly taller buildings directed to the north, east and south boundary roads of Oxford Street, Charing Cross Road and Shaftesbury Avenue. Proposals must respect the individual building by building plot widths and scale of the buildings they replace and where possible retain a traditional mix of occupiers. Rear yards, courts, back street and mews should be protected and enhanced. Design should avoid creating bland, repetitive facades.

#### 2. Commercial Activity

Commercial or mixed-use development proposals must ensure that the availability of smaller commercial premises for office and retail use is not diminished. Other than at the north, east and south boundary streets large floor plate office developments for single occupiers are not regarded as suitable developments to be supported. Ground floors should avoid creating wasted or underused space and be well-designed to increase diversity, vibrancy and activity. Lettable space in commercial and mixed-use developments, which is designed as workspace for the creative industries, is strongly supported. Existing private members' clubs will be protected and new proposals normally supported.

#### 3. Entertainment and the Night Time Economy

Existing music venues will be protected. The development of new live music venues will be supported, provided they are low impact in terms of noise and how the arrival and dispersal of customers is managed. To be supported proposals for new A1 cafes, A3, A4, A5 and D2 uses above or adjacent to residential use must apply the 'agent of change' principle and demonstrate that they will not have adverse impacts on residential amenity that cannot be mitigated. Proposals that provide additional public toilet capacity will be strongly supported.

#### 4. Housing

Affordable housing to be provided as part of new development or, if that is not practically possible, then within the Soho Neighbourhood Area. On-street parking permits will not be approved for residential development, other than provision for the disabled. No overly large flats supported. Major developments must use Construction Management Plans (CMP) and Delivery Service Plans (DSP) to show that they have avoided or mitigated adverse impacts and positively enhanced amenity and the environment.

#### 5. Environment

Applicants should also maximise measures that contribute to improving air quality and reduce reliance on the use of fossil fuels. Proposals that waste heat and energy and cause carbon emissions should be avoided. Measures to retrofit and improve the sustainability of existing buildings and reduce their emissions will normally be strongly supported. The public car parks at Brewer Street and Poland Street should be safeguarded and temporarily protected from development that changes their use until proposal for their reuse as sites for micro-consolidation can be brought forward. The creation of new green 'pocket parks' on roofs for employees and others to use will normally be supported, provided a robust management plan is in place to mitigate any potential adverse impacts such as noise nuisance. Development proposals should provide the highest feasible level of greening.

All development proposals should be designed in such a way as to facilitate pedestrian movement. Development that provides carefully considered new public access to improve pedestrian connectivity and convenience will normally be supported. Facades and entrances to premises should display clearly a street number for each premises to facilitate better way-finding. Major developments will be expected where practical to provide more cycle stands in the immediate vicinity of the development for use by visitors to the building.

Waste and servicing facilities must provide for off-street waste and recycling facilities within the boundary of the development and not obstruct pavements by dumped rubbish bags. Major Commercial developments to additionally provide extra waste and recycling storage capacity for neighbouring small commercial units within a 100 metre radius provided strictly controlled by suitable technology to weigh and record waste materials, levy appropriate fees and prevent unauthorised access. The provision or retailing of food and drink should store food waste as a separate category and use a food waste recycling service.

The plan designates two quiet oases at Ramillies Street/Place and Dufour's Place. All applicants within the Soho Neighbourhood Area are also encouraged to use every opportunity to provide public seating whenever possible as part of their development.