



Regulation 19 City Plan 2019-2040 Consultation

Response from Baker Street Quarter Partnership

About Us

Baker Street Quarter Partnership (BakerStreetQ) was established as a Business Improvement District to bring a new-found purpose and focus to the Baker Street and Marylebone area. We represent 180 businesses and property owners - the majority of our occupier members are from the corporate office sector with hospitality also featuring in our membership. BakerStreetQ is driving forward positive change to benefit everyone in the area ensuring it is a place for people and a place for business and to ensure it is the West End's Commercial District of choice.

To this end the Partnership works towards six key priorities to enhance the area:

- Quality Spaces & Streets
- Better Air Quality
- Safe & Cared For
- Vibrant & Entertaining
- Local Networks & Community
- Collective Voice & Area Identity

Our response

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Plan. We respond below to the specific policies most relevant to our work and our area of benefit around Baker Street.

Spatial Strategy: Policy 1 and consequent policies

We support Policy 1 in identifying the CAZ as a location for growth. The following policies then identify some particular areas for growth, such as the Opportunity Areas along with specific policies. But there is no mention of the approach to be taken in the areas within the CAZ outside of these designated areas. It would be helpful if the plan properly identified Baker Street as suitable for growth and identified the town centres as the focus for commercial growth.

Policy 8 (D): Housing Delivery (short term lets)

We repeat the support we made for this policy in the earlier draft City Plan consultation and welcome the intention to resist the loss of housing to temporary sleeping accommodation. Unregulated short term letting continues to have a negative impact on communities and neighbouring properties and enforcement is therefore key, although we understand that this is a difficult and resource intensive activity. We would ask that the City Council properly resource rigorous enforcement action and would support any lobbying attempts by the Council for higher penalties for those found undertaking such activities.

Policy 9: Affordable Housing and Policy 42 Building Height

We support the Council's commitment to increase the amount of affordable housing in the city as this ensures that in the future, greater numbers of workers across all sectors will be able to live within the borough.

We note the proposed changes to the council's Mixed Use Policy in the City Plan and welcome the tiered approach to providing affordable housing on net additional floorspace for office and hotel developments.

We are however concerned that some of the proposed requirements will prevent development and therefore stymie the Council's ambition for both economic growth and the provision of additional affordable housing. Our concern relates to the requirements for buildings of more than 30 metres coupled with the significant increase in the requirements for affordable housing for larger office and hotel developments:

Section 42.B: buildings of more than 30 metres, or those that are more than twice the prevailing context height (whichever is lower) will be considered to be tall buildings and will therefore need to satisfy both the general principles in clause D and relevant locational principles in clauses E and F. Throughout much of our area, the general building height is around 30m, and the addition of space will be required to make any redevelopment viable. This will therefore require meeting a much more stringent set of policy requirements, as they will be considered to be a tall building, despite not being a great deal taller than the surrounding buildings. Stronger policy recognition for the role of commercial districts in job creation would be welcome.

We note that payment in lieu for affordable housing would be accepted for office developments adding less than 2,750sqm, we are concerned that the requirement for larger office and hotel developments within commercial areas to deliver 35% affordable housing on-site. This has the potential to limit the development potential of larger sites within our area in the longer term. The Baker Street townscape is already constrained by historic mansion blocks on the commercial frontage.

This restriction on adding space coupled with the requirement for affordable housing will make large scale redevelopment in our area unviable thereby preventing both commercial growth and growth in affordable housing.

We note that a number of new 40m+ developments in Westminster were able to provide large affordable housing contributions as well as significant public realm contributions around their sites. We are cautious that by constraining development outside the designated five Opportunity Areas to

30m, we are likely to see a decrease in larger applications that could have delivered tangible benefits to Westminster, since new schemes will not meet the viability threshold if policy compliant.

We would ask Westminster to consider how section 42.B is worded to enable scope for taller buildings within strategic locations which deliver clear benefits to their immediate area and support the current case by case approach to considering such applications. Many regular commercial centres such as Baker Street are excluded.

Policy 14: Supporting Economic Growth

We welcome the Council's recognition of the importance of the office sector to employment and the Westminster economy in this policy and the protection of office floorspace in para (D). We welcome proposals to recover the lost office stock identified since 2005 but suggest that to meet the Council's targets for jobs growth, significant office development will be required, and yet this is put at risk by other policies as set out above. Furthermore, we do not consider that the target floorspace for jobs translates realistically to meet the jobs target.

Policy 15: Town Centres, high streets and the CAZ

We support greater flexibility in use of town centres. Our recently completed retail strategy emphasises the need for this flexibility of use to ensure the future health of town centres and commercial districts as consumers shopping habits continue to change. We are working with our members to drive forward the ambition of this strategy to enhance and sustain the retail and leisure offer and thereby the vitality and economic growth of the area. We would be delighted to share this strategy and accompanying research with the Council.

We welcome the extension of the Baker Street town centre boundary and would like to suggest that this extends further to recognise the commercial district around Baker Street which is concurrent with the Baker Street Business Improvement District boundary. Our retail strategy supports this definition. Specifically, Orchard Court, Portman Square should be treated as one

We welcome the recognition that the CAZ is made up of distinct character areas and would support measures that enhance these characters, for example through use mix, street activity, types of retail and public realm design. We recognise the Council's recent positive interventions locally.

We are disappointed with the Town Centre Health Check for Baker Street and feel it does not properly reflect the district. We feel as the local Business Improvement District it would be logical for us to be asked for input into this report. In particular it does not recognise that the Council-led Baker Street Two Way project that was in construction during the author's visit to the area would bring about major improvements to the area vitally including a reduction in the dominance of traffic, improvements to the public realm, decluttering. The scoring of the cleanliness and safety and security of the area does not reflect the results of the regular surveys and street audits we carry out in the area. There is also no recognition of the local BID Street Team resource and strong performance.

Policy 44: Commerce in the Public Realm

We support this policy to resist additional kiosks and to seek the relocation of existing structures. We suggest that Conservation Area advertising policies are extended to all areas to control new phone kiosks.

Policy 16: Visitor Economy

We welcome the change to this policy to encourage hotel extensions to be linked to upgrading facilities, rather than only allowing such extensions if they serve their guests.

Policy 1 (A)9 and Policy 25: Sustainable Transport

We support policy 1 (A)9 that says “prioritising sustainable travel” but it only gets a passing mention on page 33 in para 1.16 which infers that a shift towards sustainable travel patterns only concerns making the most of public transport. We would welcome further clarification in the drafting to reflect the need to prioritise walking and cycling as the two most sustainable travel options before referring to public transport.

Similarly, in Policy 25 we would welcome clarification that pedestrian priority is paramount, followed closely by cycling, then public transport and zero and low emission vehicles.

We suggest that this Policy should also articulate the Council’s support for people with disabilities including dropped kerbs, surface level crossings, tactile paving, and encouraging London Underground to adopt a programme of introducing step free access to underground station. It should also recognise that cycling can be a good method for people with disabilities to travel.

Policy 28: Parking

We support local residents and the Marylebone Forum in their view that Marylebone is extremely well served by public transport and vehicle use should be reduced. We support the Forum’s view that on-street Parking Permits for the occupants and owners of new residential developments should be prohibited, except for zero-emissions vehicles and Disabled Badge permit holders. This is in line with most other London boroughs. We support the Forum’s opposition to the requirement for developers to provide a specific number of off-street parking spaces. This decision should be left with the developer but generally we would encourage car-free development. We want to encourage zero ownership of cars and greater use of car clubs and alternative forms of transport. If off-street parking is provided by developers, it should include 100% EV charging capacity.

Policy 30: Freight and Servicing

We strongly support proposals for freight consolidation facilities. BakerStreetQ has successfully reduced waste collection traffic in our area with a 46% reduction in trips. We would like to facilitate consolidation of delivery traffic and have an engaged business audience in this respect – however our research indicates that sustainable consolidation sites will be required at a regional or semi-regional scale to make meaningful reductions viable. We would support greater flexibility over servicing times so ‘out of hours’ deliveries can take place providing these are managed to ensure no disturbance to neighbouring properties. Our research shows that the restrictions on delivery times

for several buildings in our area leads to unintended issues in terms of disturbance to residential neighbours and additional emissions as (refrigerated) vehicles are obliged to wait for hours in the early hours on residential side streets waiting for loading bays to open in line with planning restrictions.

Policy 20: Digital Infrastructure

We support the sharing of existing facilities but would welcome WCC going further to facilitate this as we said in our response to the draft City Plan. The current approach often results in unnecessary disruption to transport and the public realm.

Policy 33: Air Quality

We strongly support the Council's policy to reduce the prevailing levels of Nitrogen Dioxide and particulate matter. Air Quality is an identified priority and concern to our business members and their employees as well as the local residents we work with on a number of projects and the Marylebone Forum. We welcome recognition of Nitrogen Dioxide and particulates in particular given their impact on health in the local environment and consequently would like to see these emphasised in line with the emphasis on CO2 in other parts of the plan. Policy should also recognise for the future that EVs still produce particulates (from brakes and tyres) and that larger vehicles will not convert to EV for some time.

Along with the Marylebone Forum we would like to see Policy 33D make explicit that all major developments within Air Quality Focus Areas will be required to achieve Air Quality Positive status.

Policy 37: Energy (not managing Air Quality)

We support the City Plan's zero carbon development proposals for the City. We ask that WCC consider the impact that the Plan's development targets will have on energy demand. The electrical infrastructure in Marylebone is not capable of supporting new green energy developments.

Policy 35: Green Infrastructure

We support the protection given to green spaces but would ask that there may be occasions where development enhances the use of spaces (such as a toilet, café or temporary use) and that provided it is ancillary to the use of that space then such a small loss may be acceptable.

Policy 41: Townscape and architecture Para (F)

We support the changes to this policy to allow upwards extensions to create additional commercial space but request that this policy should be cross referenced with Policy 42 to make clear that such extensions are not considered to constitute a tall building. Buildings already at 30m should still be capable of good growth.

We ask that WCC ensure that new designs are more inclusive and accessible where possible to create a prominent modern destination for work, tourism and leisure, which should be accessible to people with a wide range of disabilities.

Policy 44: Public Realm

We are pleased to see the Plan acknowledge the importance of investment in the public realm and how important it is for WCC to work with local businesses and landowners to create enhanced public spaces which make the most of the City's assets and improve wayfinding.

We would like to see the Plan provide greater support to the City's existing high street businesses through enhancements in the management and physical appearance of the public realm. High quality signage and advertising is crucial to direct pedestrians to notable tourist destinations, like Madame Tussauds. Such improvements should include wider pavements and benches for seating as this will help to increase pedestrian footfall and dwell times and provide facilities for more fragile residents and visitors to rest and relax.

Policy 45: Security measures in the public realm

We welcome the Plan's emphasis on sensitively designed security measures but suggest that the Council should go further in developing a hostile vehicle mitigation strategy for the CAZ and this could include traffic calming measures to limit vehicle approach speeds and sensitively designed vehicle security barriers. These should be unobtrusive and blend into the natural streetscape. We would welcome engagement with the City Council, TfL (for TLRN) and the Police to assist in developing such a strategy.

I would be happy to meet Officers to run through any of these concerns in more detail and clarify them if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely

Penny Alexander
Chief Executive