

CITY OF WESTMINSTER

COUNCIL MEETING – 15 JULY 2009

AGENDA ITEM 6 – QUESTIONS AND REPLIES

1. COUNCILLOR PAUL DIMOLDENBERG TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

Why does she want to lift £3m from the Affordable Housing fund to promote Intermediate Housing when a paper considered by Westminster's Housing Commission, prepared by the Council's Strategy and Performance team states "that while there is some demand for intermediate market products in Westminster, the reality is that such housing remains largely unaffordable for those to whom it is directed and the combination of mortgage and rental payments often make this unaffordable particularly for family sized properties with only one income earner?"

COUNCILLOR PHILIPPA ROE

I am delighted that you've asked this question because it gives me an opportunity tonight to announce one of our first intermediate products. It's targeted at people earning between £20,000 and £30,000 per year and is an intermediate rent product which will be particularly suitable to key workers which I know is an area which you have asked about before. It's for key workers and people earning between £20,000 and £30,000 per year who live or work within Westminster. Intermediate Housing is a very important part of a mixed community. At the moment, within Westminster, we have a very polarised community between those who can afford to buy privately and rent and those who are in social housing. If you look at any examples internationally, the Hills Report, the Housing Commission Report, they all state that for a proper working community it needs to be fully integrated and that means tiers of people on different earning powers within the community. There are parts of the City where we all know we have severe deprivation with low education attainment, major health discrepancies and life expectancy discrepancies and joblessness. This is something that we need to tackle and as part of tackling this I really believe that the introduction of Intermediate Housing, bringing people into the community who are working, bringing the money that they bring into the community, bringing role models into the community, not just for the adults but also for the children who will go to the same schools, is a fundamental part of improving the lives of the poorest people in this country.

COUNCILLOR PAUL DIMOLDENBERG

Given that the Council's own report says that the Intermediate Housing products that she is promoting are largely unaffordable by the people to whom they are directed, why is she continuing with this and given the undeniable shortage of social rented housing in Westminster and the Council's abysmal record of providing new homes for social rent, would not that £3m be better spent on providing more socially rented homes in Westminster?

COUNCILLOR PHILIPPA ROE

I think I have partially answered your question. We are providing homes for people earning between £20,000 and £30,000 a year. That's a new initiative. These will be for single people at this stage and we are looking for family homes as well, again targeting those people that are on lower incomes. We are looking at a variety of options but it will take time for some of them to come through. The products that we are deliberately creating are not just at the higher end of the spectrum of people who can't afford currently to live in Britain. It's to capture everybody who wants to live here and that is a fundamentally important part of mixed communities within Westminster and I think is money well spent. Even your own Government talks about the importance of mixed communities. They themselves are targeting 10,000 new Intermediate Homes they want built across the country. The GLA also support Intermediate Housing and this Council fully supports it as well.

2. COUNCILLOR PAUL DIMOLDENBERG TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

Can he explain who is responsible for the fact that work has stopped on the project to renew Broadley Gardens and the Imps Nursery in Church Street and why the gardens were ripped up, closed and boarded up before the financial and planning details had been agreed? Is this not the most appalling failure for which the people of Church Street are now having to pay the price?

COUNCILLOR LEE ROWLEY

Broadley Street Gardens, as you've correctly said, began work in the Autumn of last year and was originally anticipated to be concluded in the summer of this year. I take full responsibility for the fact that hasn't occurred and the reason I do so is because there have been a number of issues. The primary one at the moment is that we are waiting on a report back from Thames Water because there has been a sewer issue which has been identified in Broadley Street Gardens itself and until we get that report back from Thames Water which could be a number of months away, although we hope it is not, we cannot go any further on this issue.

COUNCILLOR PAUL DIMOLDENBERG

I think the sewer has probably been there for about 100 years so it shouldn't be that much of a surprise. So will he apologise for the Council's abysmal failures? And will those responsible be disciplined for their failure and will he tell us tonight when Broadley Gardens and the Imps Nursery will be open?

COUNCILLOR LEE ROWLEY

I certainly won't apologise on behalf of the Council and nor will I apologise on his behalf of officers who I think have got nothing to apologise for. I might apologise on his behalf for being absolutely shameless in his use of issues in trying to make a partisan point. The point about Broadley Street Gardens is that I hope everybody within this chamber agrees that we need to and we want to improve it. I hope everybody in this chamber agrees that we are going to do so. I hope they cease to put out their stupid press releases that we don't have the money to do so. I look forward to, in the near future, as soon as we can sort out the planning, and the

Thames Water sewer issue to open Broadley Street Gardens so the residents in Church Street can enjoy this area once again.

3. COUNCILLOR PAUL DIMOLDENBERG TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

On behalf of the people of Westminster, will he accept my congratulations on Westminster moving up from 33rd place to 32nd place in this year's London Youth Games and will he share with us the secret of his success?

COUNCILLOR ED ARGAR

Well, firstly I am very pleased that the Members on this side of the chamber, the vast majority, represent the people of Westminster not the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues. In respect of the Youth Games, perhaps it would be more appropriate if rather than seeking to belittle and mock the efforts of a number of kids who worked very hard to achieve what they did, he actually congratulated them on their work in achieving the results they did. There is a lot more to do, we appreciate that and we continue to work on that but a little word of praise for the kids who are involved wouldn't go amiss.

COUNCILLOR PAUL DIMOLDENBERG

Would Westminster's young people have performed better at tennis had they had the benefit of coaching from the two Paddington Rec tennis coaches forced out of business by the City Council over the past two years?

COUNCILLOR ED ARGAR

The young people of Westminster would probably have performed better at tennis had they had the benefit of the Community Coaching Scheme which as I understand it, the tennis coaches, until last week, had expressed no willingness to participate in. On the issue of the Paddington Rec tennis coaches, as he well knows, I have a letter from him, welcoming the progress that has been made and saying he is very satisfied with it. We have reached a solution which I signed off a few days ago which creates a system whereby the tennis coaches pay a flat licence fee and a higher rate of charge for the tennis courts that they use which reflects the fact that they are using those tennis courts for a commercial purpose from which they privately gain. I think that is equitable, I think it is fair and the entire process conducted by me, officers and my predecessor in the Cabinet portfolio has been conducted in a spirit of openness and willingness to compromise and come to a conclusion which is acceptable to all parties. I hope that, rather than carping on and trying constantly to find fault with what is a very reasonable solution, he will make the point that we have achieved something here which is good for the coaches, it is good for Westminster and it benefits the community provision in our borough.

4. COUNCILLOR JUDITH WARNER TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Every organisation has a number of problems which are difficult to solve over many years. Would the Leader of the Council like to identify one, two or three which come to mind which are difficult to solve?

COUNCILLOR COLIN BARROW

Well I can tell you one that has proved very difficult over a period of time and I think I have probably the same one in mind as Councillor Warner, and that is procurement. It has proved difficult and as I was in that portfolio, I tried to do what I could about procurement and was defeated by inertia within the organisation. I have every faith in Councillor Caplan for being able to succeed where I failed.

COUNCILLOR JUDITH WARNER TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Would the Leader also like to identify how the proposed new structural arrangements for the Council will assist in solving problems and what he would expect to see happen over the next year?

COUNCILLOR COLIN BARROW

The new organisation of the Council is absolutely fundamental in that it is an absolutely fundamental re-organisation. They are starting with the top layer and designing every service to be fit for purpose from the bottom up. Designing Delivery Units that are conceived from first principles, this is what we want to achieve, this is what we want to deliver and this is how we will measure it. It is the first time that this has been done in living memory and I have every belief that despite the disruption that any re-organisation on this scale will inevitably cause and uncertainty which is, again, inevitable, I am certain that in the end we will achieve a fitter, leaner Council where some very fundamental changes will be made to some things that have dogged us for many years. We are often proud of what we do and rightly so but there is always further to go and the work that's being done by the Chief Executive and his Strategic Management Team has required courage and a great deal of dedication in order to carry it through and I salute them for that.

5. COUNCILLOR ANTHONY DEVENISH TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR BUILT ENVIRONMENT

I very much welcome the Cabinet Member for Built Environment's extensive programme of consultation for the new UDP. I hope and believe that unlike this Government's record of consultation it will be meaningful with the real involvement of our local communities to mitigate the feeling across much of society that those that rule our lives pay lip service at best to real people's views. Can I please ask him to update us specifically on one element of the UDP consultation which has been under consideration for many months between officers and developers and is of great interest to my residents namely the potential creation of a separate Respark zone or zones for certain major developments?

COUNCILLOR ROBERT DAVIS

Can I first of all thank Councillor Devenish for his question and to thank the Members of the council who have attended the workshops we have been organising as we develop the City Management plan, the main ingredient of our new Local Development Framework. At one I chaired the other day there were more than 50 members of the public, residents, developers and landowners, planning consultants and councillors present to debate a number of important issues and this is just one of a series of them happening over the month of July and early August. Of course it is essential that we consult and we listen and that is the

purpose of these workshops, but we are also inviting people to write to us to make written representations and to have meetings with our officers, because we do want to consult properly and to take on board people's views. Councillor Devenish goes on to ask specific questions concerning parking. Can I in particular therefore direct him to the workshop number 10 which we will be holding on 30th July which will be discussing such matters as Transportation and Parking and my colleague and friend Councillor Chalkley will be chairing and leading that session and I would invite him to attend that one. The issue of parking in major developments is a crucial issue, one that does need to be resolved and I am hoping that by himself and others attending that workshop we will be able to have your input in finding a way forward. However, in the meantime, we have a major scheme coming forward in the next few months, namely St John's Wood Barracks which is a scheme that you are talking about. This is a major scheme introducing many residential units and the pressure on parking there is going to be particularly difficult. We are talking to the developer, the landowner the Eyre estate, about a new scheme that will address the concerns, I know you have because you have made them to me, and to try and find a new way forward that will allow us to reduce the impact that the extra parking will have on local residents, but provide the people who live in that new estate somewhere to park. So we have taken on board what you have said and we will not only try and do something on that particular scheme, which is the first one coming forward because the others are set back a bit, but also as part of our workshops.

6. COUNCILLOR GUTHRIE MCKIE TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

Can Councillor Roe explain why we still have two vacant houses on Warlock Road and Harrow Road, which have been boarded up for six years one of which was occupied by squatters last week. Could you update us on that please?

COUNCILLOR PHILIPPA ROE

The house in Warlock Road has been vacant for I think three years not six years, but anyway, it's still a long time. It has very severe structural problems, subsistence and also some trees with some roots have been growing underneath. We are in the process of putting out to tender to re-develop that particular property. It is going to be knocked down and re-built as it's beyond actual repair and is so badly damaged. We hope to have that starting in about September and scheduled for a March finish.

COUNCILLOR GUTHRIE MCKIE

We've just had an answer earlier about the policy decision on housing. Can she develop her idea of priority in housing, which I think for many people in Westminster is much more important than housing policy, and give priority to those 3,000 families living in temporary accommodation and the same number in overcrowded accommodation and the £3m that she is raiding from the Affordable Housing fund could be used instead in Warlock Road for families?

COUNCILLOR PHILIPPA ROE

We have, as you well know, launched a real major initiative to solve overcrowding in Westminster. 44 of the most severely overcrowded families will be housed within the year; 9 have already been re-housed, we have 3 more that should hopefully re-housed in the next week or so; and we are buying 20 more family sized properties

in the north of the borough which will specifically help in solving this overcrowding problem. I would very much like to solve overcrowding more quickly but it is the Government targets at reducing temporary accommodation that hampers me from doing so. Bed and breakfasts are only used very, very short term for people as soon as they come onto the housing list, they are not used on long term, temporary accommodation. Suitable properties at the right size just happen to be in the private sector. In terms of housing people in temporary accommodation, we have properties coming into the system. We are always going to be over subscribed in Westminster, it is a highly desirable location for people to live. People come to the city, we have a 6 month local connection rule, which is a Government led rule, which means we do have a very, very high demand and supply is obviously limited. We are launching the largest council house building programme for a generation in community build which will certainly help to alleviate it and people needing social housing are always a priority for us. However, they cannot be the only priority and intermediate housing is an important part of improving the communities across the city. I do not think that £3m spent on developing intermediate housing is money badly spent, I think it's extremely worthwhile.

7. COUNCILLOR NICK YARKER TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Could he give me an update on the progress of the Education Commission?

COUNCILLOR MARK PAGE

Yes, certainly, I met the Education Commission yesterday, that was their last session. They will be reporting on September 15th at their launch event and I am looking forward to the recommendations they will be making for the benefit of Westminster's education in our schools.

8. COUNCILLOR NICK EVANS TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR HOUSING

To ask if she agrees with me that the Government's refusal to capping rents for tenants of RSLs in the same way that the Government has capped council tenants rents is a sign that the Government is so far past it's sell-by date that if it were a Westminster retailer it would be subject to enforcement action by Community Protection?

COUNCILLOR PHILIPPA ROE

I wholeheartedly agree. I think the rent system that is dictated by Government is entirely flawed as I've commented many times. We had a very, very successful lobbying campaign when dealing with council owned social housing and we managed to reduce the rent increase that was initially announced by about half. Unfortunately, RSLs are not in the position to get the same level of comfort from central Government that they were not going to be financially worse off for not increasing the rents to the higher amount originally proposed. Therefore the RSLs, particularly those that are in some financial difficulties, are having to put up rents to sometimes 6% or 7% which I think is extremely high in these current circumstances and extremely unfortunate. I have written to the Cabinet Minister for Housing, Margaret Beckett, when she was the Cabinet Minister, specifically asking for help for RSLs so that they would have additional support so they didn't need to put the rents up so high and we got a very waffly response back which frankly basically said no.

9. COUNCILLOR SARAH RICHARDSON TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
To thank the Leader for a copy of his Living City speech of 2 July and to ask for a further update on those projects which relate specifically to children and young people, particularly the Inter-university's initiative which was announced by him at the Living City Breakfast earlier in the year?

COUNCILLOR MARK PAGE TO REPLY

I met with the Inter-university people last week. I am reviewing this particular project and will be looking forward to the Education Commission which we've also referred to for their recommendations and working out the way forward on this project. They do valuable work, but what I want to ensure that it is the right sort of spend for the City Council, that we obtain value for money and get the results that we need for our children.

COUNCILLOR SARAH RICHARDSON

To ask for his reassurance that he keeps his promises and that he remains supportive of this initiative, which takes children from non-traditional backgrounds and helps them access higher education, particularly as I understand the Inter-university project is setting up schemes in Haringey and Hackney this September rather than Westminster which is what we had hoped.

COUNCILLOR MARK PAGE TO REPLY

If we, on Westminster Council, are going to proceed with the Inter-university project, we should do so on the basis where we are fully committed. There is no point chucking good money after bad. I am not saying that the Inter-university project doesn't do good work, but we have to ensure that we get maximum value if we are going to start to do it. I have had a discussion, as I mentioned, with the Inter-university people, and the particular funding which I think was something like £350,000. I am currently under negotiations with them of having that amount cut by two thirds so in effect, there is benefit of £200,000 to the City Council if we proceed with that. So, concentrating on doing it properly, obtaining value for money, if it is what we decide to do, is what we should do. That is the priority.

10. COUNCILLOR AUDREY LEWIS TO THE COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

I want to return to the subject of Broadley Street Gardens. I have in front of me "News from Westminster's Labour Councillors" and it refers specifically to Councillor Barbara Grahame and Councillor Aziz Toki. I have always had extremely good relations with both of those Councillors and have worked very closely with them on Broadley Street among other issues. Can it really be true that they thought that it was Mayor Johnson who refused to give Westminster £400,000 for the re-building of the gardens rather than it failed to get enough popular votes? Secondly, is it credible that they knew nothing about the sewer which is certainly suggested in this thing?

COUNCILLOR LEE ROWLEY

With regards to this specific issue, I think when we look at Labour Party press releases what we've got to remember is they are done by a man so obsessed with the Conservative Party that he has to knock these out in the wee small hours and has absolutely no concept of whether they bear any resemblance to reality whatsoever. So I think we shouldn't take any notice of the Westminster Labour Party press releases, but what I will say on the very serious note about Broadley Street Gardens is that I regret the partisanship which has been injected into this. The City Council is absolutely committed to regenerating Broadley Street Gardens, despite the subsistence problems which occurred before. I think there are some members in the gallery tonight who have come to talk about Broadley Street Gardens. I will be very happy to meet them if they wish to do so. We are going to get this sorted, we are going to get it sorted as quickly as we can do but don't be deceived by the Labour Party, they are playing this for party political advantage because they lost Church Street in the by-election last year.

11. COUNCILLOR CAROLYN KEEN TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Would he care to join me in congratulating the staff and students of Westminster's Adult Education Service on their recent "Excellent" Ofsted inspection?

COUNCILLOR EDWARD ARGAR

I take great pleasure in doing so. I know that both the Board, led by Councillor Keen, and the service led by Barbara Holm, worked very hard for this "Excellent" Ofsted inspection report which recognised not only the excellent teaching and the hard work of the students, but also the vitally important role that the Adult Education Service plays in helping Westminster residents in terms of their skills, both for work and for moving between jobs at a time when many of them are extremely worried about the consequences of the recession brought about not only by global factors but also by this Labour Government.

COUNCILLOR CAROLYN KEEN

Would he like to comment on the Ofsted Inspector's remarks regarding the poor accommodation in the light of the Learning and Skills Council's recent decision to withdraw, the in-principle offer of £9.2m towards a state-of-the-art new facility for adult education?

COUNCILLOR EDWARD ARGAR

I entirely share the disappointment of both Councillor Keen, the Board, the workers and students and I daresay many future learners across this city of what appears to be a very significant set-back to the ambitious plans that the service and the City Council had, matched by a significant financial contribution from this City Council, to provide a state-of-the-art adult education centre. It is extremely disappointing that having offered this money in principle, utter incompetence at the heart of Government, particularly through the LSC, has led to promised monies being withdrawn with a dreadful impact, potentially, on our learners. I would say that I am lobbying hard for a meeting with the Minister to ask him re-think the decision that has been taken and I very much hope that the Members opposite will join with us in

trying to get the Government and the LSC to honour it's promises rather than putting out press releases which not only get the cost of the overall centre wrong, 100% wrong, but also maintain the project has been axed when, as any prudent council would, we are reviewing the options in the light of the Government and the LSC axing it's promised money.

12. COUNCILLOR FRANCES BLOIS TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR BUILT ENVIRONMENT

After the withdrawal of the Chelsea Barracks planning application and following the opposition of a number of residents particularly in Belgravia, please can the Cabinet Member give us the outline timetable for this prestigious site so it doesn't remain an eyesore for a number of years to come?

COUNCILLOR ROBERT DAVIS

Officers have met with Qatari DR and their advisors about the future of the site. As I understand it, the situation is that the developers have indicated that they intend to submit an outline application by the end of this year, 2009, and they are currently in the process of selecting a master planner for the site. In the meantime I urge them, in the strongest possible terms, to heed the lessons of the previous application and ensure that ward councillors, residents groups and in particular the Belgravia Residents' Association and the Chelsea Barracks Action Group, are kept fully informed throughout the process. Transparency and openness should form the basis of their work, from the selection of the master planners, throughout the design process and through to the submission of any future application.

13. COUNCILLOR ALAN BRADLEY TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CITY MANAGEMENT

Would the Cabinet Member like to give us a progress report on the Thames Water VMR project in Westminster?

COUNCILLOR DANNY CHALKLEY

The good news is that Thames Water have now completed 49 miles of their current Victoria Mains Replacement programme of which all Members will be very, very aware. The bad news is that Thames Water still have 35 miles to go, so to put that in percentage terms they are now 71% complete of their overall mileage within the City of Westminster. Thus far, works have tended to concentrate principally in Little Venice, West End, Maida Vale and in around Pimlico and my latest report confirms, or suggests that they are still on programme to complete in April 2011.

COUNCILLOR ALAN BRADLEY

Is the Cabinet Member aware that I chair a meeting regularly with Thames Water and local councillors to review the progress of the work in Pimlico and that recently, perhaps not necessarily connected with a change in contractor, there has been a significant deterioration in the notification to residents when their streets are going to be affected, in dealing with parking suspensions and that generally the degree of customer care that they have been exercising has fallen well below that which we would expect and does he intend to meet Thames Water to make representations in that regard?

COUNCILLOR DANNY CHALKLEY

I am well aware of the good work that Alan does through that group and I am very grateful. Plainly, the works have caused a great deal of disruption to our residents, to our businesses and to our visitors over the course of the last 2½ years.

However, Thames Water have shown willingness to work with us and learn by their mistakes and also to build local relationships. I am aware of a breakdown in the consultation and communication process as a result of the new individual contractors being involved, not least because there was an incident only this morning on St George's Drive in which I had to spend a couple of hours of my time trying to calm an extremely distressed resident who thought that Thames Water was about to come through into her bathroom and bedroom. So I've already raised the point with officers and yes, Martin Low and I will be making the relevant representations.

14. COUNCILLOR BARRIE TAYLOR TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Will Councillor Argar join with me in congratulating Councillor Toki for all of his efforts in trying to improve the women only access to leisure and sport facilities especially swimming at Seymour and Jubilee, and act on the need for more female lifeguards at both centres and the need to improve the booking procedures at Jubilee where local residents of Queen's Park have been regularly refused access to the weekly women only session when we've got three sessions down at Seymour?

COUNCILLOR EDWARD ARGAR

I will join with you in congratulating the work that Councillor Toki has put into this issue. I know it's something both very close to his own heart and that of the people he represents. As members opposite will be aware, following the last Council meeting, I, along with Marian Harrington and officers from the Sports Unit, met with Councillor Toki to discuss exactly this issue and ask that he wrote to us, setting out in detail what he thought would be a workable scheme. He's done that. Some questions I believe have gone back to him to clarify some of that and he can expect a substantive response to the points he made within the next week or so.

COUNCILLOR BARRIE TAYLOR

Thank you for that response, but having brought the problems to the attention of, particularly Nuffield, who are one of our contracts would you now undertake not only to seek improvements in the number of sessions and of female staff at Jubilee but following representations by Councillor Toki congratulate him for also getting Imperial NHS Trust to make available St Mary's Hospital pool for women only swimming sessions?

COUNCILLOR EDWARD ARGAR

Thank you. In respect of women only provision in our sports facilities, as both Councillor Taylor and Councillor Toki will be aware and as Councillor Toki acknowledged when we had our meeting, there is a very careful balance to be struck by both recognising and where possible, accommodating the cultural needs of particular parts of the community, but also alongside that recognising this is a

service available for all and that in doing so we must ensure a balance is struck without in any way disadvantaging other users of what is a finite resource where we only have a certain number of sessions. It would be premature of me to attempt to answer specific questions about specific bookings at this time, but as I've said Councillor Toki can expect, in writing, as on previous occasions when other members of the opposition have written with specific points to me, a substantive response in writing within a week or so answering that question.

15. COUNCILLOR NICOLA AIKEN TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY POLICY

With today's news that job losses are now at a record high could the Cabinet Member give me assurances that he is continuing to support local businesses, particularly small ones and local residents who have lost their jobs in Westminster during this recession?

COUNCILLOR BRIAN CONNELL

Any words that I can say about Westminster's response will be cold comfort to those people who are finding themselves unemployed as a result of a Prime Minister who claims to have abolished "boom and bust" and who still seems to be unable to recognise his own role in making this terrible recession even worse than it would have been otherwise. We, in Westminster, as part of the Conservative Party, are continuing to respond to these. We've seen a Conservative Mayor, Boris, over in Brussels, fighting for the rights of the financial sector in London and here in Westminster our economic recovery platform, together with Westminster Works which has focused on trying to bring people who are out of work back into the work place have both been well implemented and are well on their way to progressing. I know that Councillor Aiken has been particularly concerned about small businesses in the south of the city and in her ward and I welcome the recent meeting with my Deputy, Councillor Marshall, who was very keen to hear the exciting plans which she has for the area.

COUNCILLOR NICOLA AIKEN

In the same vein, as the Lead Member for the regeneration of Pimlico shopping district, could you give me assurances that you will be supportive of the re-vamp and refurbishment of Tachbrook Market and Warwick Way and that it won't be delayed and could even be speeded up?

COUNCILLOR BRIAN CONNELL

I very much welcome the impact that physical infrastructure developments can have on regenerating the wider economy of an area and the recently re-opened Maida Hill Market I hope has been visited by many colleagues who will have seen a physical development but which is stimulating a large number of people to come into that location. With regards to Tachbrook Market, we very much look forward to seeing that through to success and it has my personal interest and support. I know there are additional initiatives which Councillor Aiken is keen to see which we will try to support whilst leveraging in the benefit from other businesses in the area who may be willing to co-share some of the financial costs.

16. COUNCILLOR LOUISE HYAMS TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Following on from the stunning success of the refurbishment of Marble Arch, I am really pleased that we are looking at other projects, many of which are in my ward. In the Piccadilly scheme, which I am very pleased is going to happen, could we use the opportunity, whilst we are doing that scheme, to look at all the street furniture and the paving in the roads affected, particularly St James's Street which is looking very shabby and could do with some of his magic refurbishment.

COUNCILLOR COLIN BARROW

Well I am proud to take sole responsibility for the refurbishment of Marble Arch. I am very grateful for the plaudits of everybody concerned but it is down to some very dedicated work on the part of some officers who were, it is true to say, under the gun. Nevertheless it was beautifully executed and a major lift to the spirit, and those sorts of things aren't often spoken about but it really has a major effect and more and more people have been saying "good on you, well done, you've got something done", as opposed to talking about it for ages so that's good. Secondly, you referred, perhaps carelessly, to the fact that the Piccadilly Scheme is going to happen. I wish I could guarantee that. We have, as the publicity surrounding it says quite clearly, we have a list of 7 major projects, not all of which are in Councillor Hyams' ward although she has her appropriate share. For some of which we have the money. For all of which we have the conviction that they are things that will be good for getting the city to look good for the Olympics, getting people here for the Olympics and going back home for a generation saying that London was a fantastic place to look at and a fantastic place to be in. That is a responsibility that we have as custodians of the centre of London but it also a responsibility that the Mayor has, as custodian for London as a whole. So we have been aiming our lobbying activity through, of course, the Evening Standard, in the time honoured fashion, aiming lobbying activity squarely at the Mayor, who gets it, who understands the significance of those parts of town but has also undertaken to look after outer London as well as the traditional places in inner London but that balance requires careful negotiation. I have been doing some of that today. I have been pleased to say that in the area around Piccadilly, I was quite surprised to find that the stakeholders (which is a term which only has about 20 minutes to live), around there all think it is a pretty good idea, which I was quite surprised about because there were clearly some people who would like Pall Mall to be nice and quiet. It looks like a good scheme, it looks as though it works but we have to see if we can scrape the money together to do it. The easy bit is painting the road and changing the lights. That's the easy and cheap bit. The hard part is replacing everything with York Stone and fixing the lighting. That's the bit that makes it look fabulous and that's the bit that's strategically important to London. We will have to see if we can persuade the Mayor of that.

17. COUNCILLOR FRIXOS TOMBOLIS TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

As he well knows the PCT is now undergoing a reorganisation so I wanted to ask him what he would consider to be a successful outcome from that re-organisation?

COUNCILLOR EDWARD ARGAR

Thank you. I'm assuming by this you are referring to the changes in the roles of some of the personnel at the top of the PCT and the broader commissioning role that Michael Scott, in particular, has taken on. Michael Scott, the Chief Executive of the PCT in Westminster, has taken on not only that role but a role as the Chief Executive of the commissioning cluster for the north west of London and his Deputy, Paul Jenkins, supported by Karen Broughton continue to work day-to-day. Paul works with Michael largely on the cluster but Karen has the day-to-day running of the PCT. The purpose of that is that the NHS feels, and we support them in this, where appropriate in certain circumstances commissioning across borough boundaries can achieve certain economies of scale and better results for those boroughs. I am confident that Michael Scott will manage both to do that effectively, but also to keep his eye on the ball in Westminster.

COUNCILLOR COLIN BARROW

I have to say I would look forward to the day when we are much closer with the health service even than we are today. I think that the partnership with the health service is showing itself to be very effective and the closer it gets the better it is. I'd like to see us go further because the bit of the health service that is in Westminster is best under Westminster control. While there are some advantages in what Michael is doing in other parts of town, what we have in Westminster we could approach them much more closely and we saw examples at the City Partnership recently when closer working on, for example, mental health and the consequences on our social care obligations could be very easily done by a single organisation and I think we should move in that direction.

COUNCILLOR FRIXOS TOMBOLIS

Does he agree that the boundaries of the PCT should be identical with the council boundaries?

COUNCILLOR EDWARD ARGAR

Yes.

18. COUNCILLOR ALASTAIR MOSS TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CITY MANAGEMENT

Is he aware that some motorcycle signs are being regularly defaced, particularly in the West End? And does he feel that's part of an orchestrated campaign?

COUNCILLOR DANNY CHALKLEY

It is regrettable that some people choose to exercise their opposition to the Council's Motorcycle Charging policy by defacing our signs and at one point it was a widespread problem, but thanks to the hard work of officers and also our Parking Attendants who have been very efficient in reporting this we have been able to get on top of the problem very quickly. I should say these actions are illegal and in no way affect our ability to enforce those particular bays.

COUNCILLOR ALASTAIR MOSS

Will the Council be taking action against those perpetrators and indeed those who might be enticing them through other means to do this?

COUNCILLOR DANNY CHALKLEY

We are actively seeking to find these individuals employing our CCTV network and if we have evidence we will of course take action.

