

# Manifesto for Westminster



Westminster is a home to residents, a destination for visitors, a centre for business and an important driver of the UK's economy. The area's 53,000 businesses and 789,000 jobs<sup>1</sup> produce nearly £100bn in annual output – equivalent to 14% of London's GVA<sup>2</sup>.

Yet Westminster, like the rest of the country, faces a challenging economic environment. Businesses are struggling with rising costs, high business rates and continued economic uncertainty; residents are facing a challenging employment and housing market alongside ongoing cost-of-living pressures; and central London's councils are grappling with significant funding cuts.

Ahead of the local elections in May, the Westminster Property Association (WPA) is calling on Westminster's political leadership to **work with our members** to enable **sustainable growth** in the City, **support local employment and skills**, deliver **homes and infrastructure** and **maintain Westminster's economic competitiveness**. A collaborative approach between the council, the property sector and other partners will be essential to deliver these **shared ambitions** and secure **long-term prosperity**.

## What does Westminster need to thrive as a modern, global city – economically dynamic, socially inclusive and full of opportunity?



**A modern, sustainable built environment** that attracts innovative, growing businesses while celebrating and preserving Westminster's unique heritage. Historic assets should remain productive and cherished for generations, alongside state-of-the-art, flexible workspaces designed to adapt to future needs



**A skilled local workforce**, equipped with the training and opportunities to access jobs created by the City's growing businesses



**A mix of housing to support successful communities**, including more affordable homes in both intermediate and social tenures



**An exceptional visitor experience**, where people from across London and around the world enjoy world-class retail, culture, hospitality and hotel accommodation – all within vibrant public spaces that feel welcoming and safe



**World-class infrastructure** – transport, digital, and utilities – that supports the homes, businesses and communities of the future

# Our key asks



## 1. Planning policy and leadership

**Planning is central to Westminster's social prosperity and economic future.** A more flexible approach could deliver £31 billion in output over the next 20 years, unlocking new jobs, delivering much-needed homes and providing high-quality workspace in Westminster's commercial centres (the Central Activities Zone - CAZ).<sup>3</sup>

**Offices are more than places of work: they are critical economic infrastructure in Westminster.** They drive productivity, enable innovation, attract global investment and support hundreds of thousands of jobs. Offices underpin the UK's service sector economy, which accounts for 84% of jobs and 83% of GVA. For every 100 office jobs, an additional 40 are supported through supply chains and a further 18 through local high street activity.

- ✓ Champion the CAZ's economic role, recognising offices as critical economic infrastructure.
- ✓ Encourage investment in Westminster's built environment and public spaces, supporting development as a driver of economic growth and social value.
- ✓ Enable planning officers to make swift, well-informed decisions aligned with clear political priorities and strategic objectives.



## 2. Reverse the decline of office space in Westminster

Westminster has lost 7 million sq ft of office floorspace since 2018 and the availability of the best-quality workspace (prime) is just 0.8%.<sup>4</sup>

**The West End's economic success depends on the availability of high-quality, commercially viable workspace** and a sufficient pipeline of Grade A offices to support businesses now and in the future.

- ✓ Prioritise prime office and retail space in the core CAZ, while allowing greater flexibility elsewhere to meet market demand for complementary uses.
- ✓ Set bold but achievable targets to increase the supply of prime office space in key locations and provide certainty to help unlock investment in central London.
- ✓ Strengthen guidance around the City Plan's 'Retrofit First' policy to continue to build market confidence in the City Council's explicit support for redevelopment where building condition, structure or market performance requires it, recognising the significant public benefits of delivering of high-quality, sustainable workspace.



## 3. Transparent and efficient decision making

Major planning applications in Westminster have fallen by approximately 75% since 2013.<sup>5</sup>

As well as providing businesses with greater confidence to invest in Westminster through political leadership, the **planning system could be improved to support efficient decision-making.**

- ✓ Establish a more transparent and efficient planning process, with earlier engagement between applicants and the planning committee - including pre-committee presentations and informed discussions on commercial and planning considerations.
- ✓ Commission an independent review of planning documentation requirements to streamline processes and reduce unnecessary delays and costs.



## 4. Supporting vibrant communities

London needs more homes at affordable price points for local people and workers. At a time when development viability is under significant pressure and costs for residential landlords are high, the City Council should work constructively with the property sector to ensure that **planning policy, regulation and developer levies are fair, proportionate and support delivery** rather than delay it.

Development brings substantial public benefits - but these are not always visible to local communities. In 2023/24, Westminster City Council collected over £80 million in Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 contributions from developers, funding public realm improvements, affordable housing, sports facilities and community hubs. **Yet public awareness of how these funds are generated and spent remains limited<sup>6</sup>**, obscuring the direct link between new development and the tangible improvements it enables in neighbourhoods.

Greater transparency about how planning contributions support local infrastructure, services and community assets could help residents see development not only as change, but as investment - strengthening confidence that new homes and workspaces bring shared benefits alongside growth.

- ✔ Pause and review Selective Licensing for residential properties to ensure it is proportionate and avoids unintended outcomes on supply of housing and rents, negatively impacting residents.
- ✔ Refocus affordable housing requirements to better support key workers in the local community and intermediate housing needs.
- ✔ Commit to not introducing the 'second bite' residential development payments which risk undermining scheme viability and slowing delivery.
- ✔ Improve communication with residents on how developer contributions benefit local areas and enhance transparency on how funds are allocated and spent.



## 5. Champion the West End's global city status

The West End plays a vital role in driving Westminster's position as an **international centre and a magnet for visitors, workers, and businesses**. This appeal fuels economic growth, generating significant **direct spending in the area and supporting extensive supply chains with local SMEs**. Oxford Street alone is responsible for around 1% of the UK's economic output<sup>7</sup>: we welcome our civic leaders working collaboratively to revitalise the area and ensure its long-term success.

- ✔ Rebuild investor confidence and re-establish Oxford Street as the UK's premier retail destination through partnership and policy alignment with the Oxford Street Development Corporation and other partners.
- ✔ Set specific, measurable targets as part of Westminster's growth strategy to monitor progress and attract long-term investment.
- ✔ Continue to review the impact of the 'After Dark Strategy' to ensure a balanced, successful nighttime economy.

# About Westminster Property Association

The WPA represents leading owners, investors, developers and professional advisers across Westminster's property sector. Our members are responsible long-term stewards of the built environment, committed to delivering sustainable growth and social value.

The WPA is committed to Westminster's future as a thriving and prosperous City for business and communities. As an organisation we have:



### **Pledged £255,000 over 3 years**

to support Young Westminster Foundation's Mastering My Future employability programme, providing training, mentoring, skills development and work experience for 14–18-year-olds



### **Partnered with the City Council**

to create a net zero city by 2040 through the Sustainable City Charter, bringing together a broad network of businesses committed to reducing operational carbon emissions



### **Campaigned in partnership with the City Council**

for CIL flexibility, to redirect unspent planning contributions into affordable housing

#### References:

1. [Westminster City Council, 'Facts and figures about Westminster'](#)
2. [Westminster Property Association, 'Delivering Good Growth in Westminster'](#)
3. [Westminster Property Association, 'Delivering Good Growth in Westminster'](#)
4. [Westminster Property Association, 'Space for Change: Westminster Deep Dive'](#)
5. Ibid.
6. [Westminster Property Association, 'Social Value in the Built Environment'](#)
7. [GLA, 'Oxford Street economic growth'](#)
8. Volterra, 'WPA Economic Footprint'
9. [Westminster City Council, 'Annual Accounts 2024/2025'](#)

## Our members provide:



### **£3 billion**

in direct economic output each year



### **c.£1 billion**

in annual tax and business rates<sup>8</sup>



### **£35 million**

in CIL raised in the past two years<sup>9</sup> - equivalent to 10 GP health centres