

City Management Plan workshop briefing notes

Extensions and Alterations

What are the issues?

There is a wide range of building stock within the City of Westminster, including terraced buildings, modern blocks of flats and offices and a variety of community and institutional buildings. The City also has a uniquely rich historic environment with a very high proportion of buildings of architectural and historic interest.

There is a constant need to adapt the existing stock of buildings to meet changing demands. The challenge is to accommodate the need for extensions and alterations to properties, but at the same time to safeguard the city's valuable historic environment and incorporate sustainable design principles, safety and inclusive access. In addition, alterations and extensions to listed buildings need to be highly sensitive to the existing historic fabric in order to preserve the special interest of the building.

Alterations and extensions cover a wide range of development including:

- Extensions to the front, rear or side of an existing building (including boundary walls and hardstandings);
- Extensions at roof level;
- Underground extensions;
- External alterations such as the replacement of windows and shopfronts, the creation of patios and terraces and the installation of mechanical plant, telecommunications equipment and security equipment.



A rich and diverse historic environment

7pm to 10pm, 13th July 2009

17th floor City Hall - Committee Rooms 3 & 4



City of Westminster

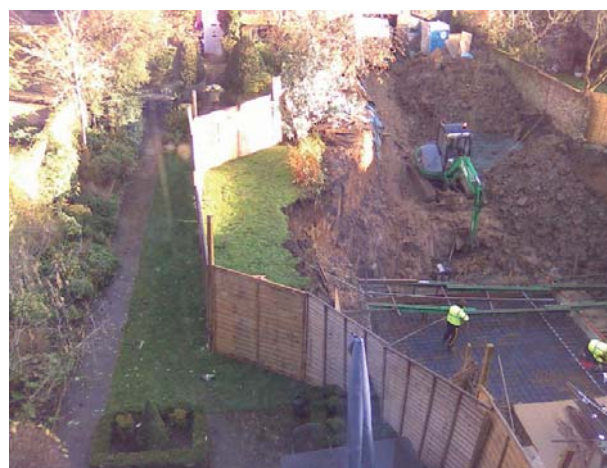
PLANNING & CITY DEVELOPMENT

If not handled sensitively, extensions and alterations can harm the appearance of buildings and areas. For example, excessively large extensions can be over-dominant and unsightly in public and private views and alterations that use poor quality materials or do not relate to the design of the existing building can easily erode the quality and interest of the streetscape. Similarly, mechanical plant, telecommunications equipment and security equipment can greatly detract from the appearance of a building if installed in a prominent location. Careful consideration needs to be given to the design, location and materials of extensions and alterations to ensure that they are successfully integrated into the existing building and surrounding area. It should be noted that extensions and mechanical plant can also have a detrimental impact on residential amenity and this must be taken into account along with the design considerations.



Replacement windows, although improving thermal performance, can harm character and appearance of buildings.

In recent years, basement extensions have become increasingly popular. However, they can cause problems due their impact on trees, archaeology, drainage, the structural stability of adjoining buildings and underground utilities. Basement extensions can also have an adverse visual impact on their surroundings because of associated rooflights, hard standings, escape stairs, railings and the loss of sustainable planting volume to enable gardens and especially trees to flourish. Their impact on gardens and open space will be discussed further at the Natural Environment Workshop.



Excavation for a basement extension

What have you told us?

Core Strategy Preferred Options and City Management Plan Consultation

- Concerns were expressed over the balance to be struck between sustainable design, inclusive access and the importance of preserving and enhancing the historic environment.
- Some people felt that the sustainable design policies were too general and that there is a lack of sustainability targets. There was strong support for living roofs and the encouragement of energy efficiency.
- There was general support for the idea that alterations and extensions should respect local character and distinctiveness.

- Request to discuss boundary walls and hard standings
- Request to discuss mansard roof extensions
- Extensions which are proposed to improve space standards for potential occupants and increase internal space can often conflict with urban design and environmental standards.

Conservation Area Audit Consultations

- These responses showed that there is concern over the impacts of basement extensions and the loss of rear gardens through rear extensions. Some people also feel that the City Council's current restrictions on roof extensions are too stringent.

National and Regional Guidance

PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development (January 2005) places a strong emphasis on high quality inclusive design and recommends that design policies promote and reinforce local distinctiveness.

PPG 15: Planning and the Historic Environment (September 1994) advises that special attention be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character of conservation areas. With regard to listed buildings, it advises that some degree of sensitive alteration or extension is often possible but there should be a proper balance between accommodating new uses and preserving the special interest of the building.

In recent years, government guidance has been placing increasing emphasis on sustainability. PPS22: Renewable Energy (August 2004) and the Supplement to PPS1: Planning and Climate Change (December 2007) both promote sustainable design and construction and the London Plan (last updated February 2008) promotes the use of renewable energy technologies. English Heritage's guidance on sustainability advises that the installation of external micro-generation equipment may often be inappropriate on historic buildings and emphasises that

reducing the demand for energy within the building can be just as important in achieving sustainability aims. PPG15 states that double glazing will not generally be appropriate on listed buildings. The issue of sustainable design and construction will be discussed further in the Sustainable Design Workshop.

The Town and Country Planning General Permitted Development Order (GDPO) allows a variety of external alterations to be carried out without planning permission both within and outside conservation areas. Basement extensions can be 'permitted development' if treated as extensions under Part 1, Class A of the GPDO which relates to 'The enlargement, improvement or alteration of a dwellinghouse'. If treated in this way, permitted basement extensions would be limited by the same restrictions on size and location as above-ground extensions. The introduction of microgeneration equipment can also be classed as 'permitted development' in certain circumstances.

Current Unitary Development Plan (2007) Policy and local guidance

STRA 27 promotes the highest standards of sustainable urban design and architecture.

STRA 28 seeks the preservation or enhancement of the built and landscaped environment of Westminster.

STRA 29 seeks the preservation or enhancement of listed buildings, historic parks and gardens and archaeological heritage.

DES 1 seeks development that is of the highest standards of sustainable and inclusive design and respects the local context.

DES 5 relates to extensions and alterations including shopfronts and mechanical plant. It states that permission may be refused for extensions where they rise above the penultimate storey of a building or where they occupy an excessive part of the garden ground or basement area.



A rich and diverse historic environment.

DES 6 relates specifically to roof level alterations and states that permission for roof extensions may be refused where additional floors would adversely affect the character or unity of a building or group of buildings, where buildings are completed compositions, where the extension would be unsightly in longer public or private views or where historically significant roof forms would be lost.

DES 7 relates to townscape management and states that the loss of boundary walls and railings will be resisted where they form an important feature of the street scene and encourages traditionally detailed new and replacement boundaries. This policy also states that permission (where required) will not be granted for the formation of hardstandings where there is loss of garden ground that is important to the character and appearance of a conservation area; where there is a detrimental impact on the setting of a listed building; where there is a loss of front garden area and boundary treatment; or where there the site is of importance for residential amenity.

DES 9 seeks the preservation or enhancement of conservation areas and their settings.

DES 10 seeks the protection and enhancement of listed buildings and their settings.

The City Council would like the City Management Plan to cover all of these Unitary Development Plan design policy areas and so these can be referred to at the workshop sessions.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

The design policies above are explained in more detail in the SPGs, 'Development and Demolition in Conservation Areas' (April 1996) and 'Roofs: A Guide to Alterations and Extensions on Domestic Buildings' (March 1995). Advice on sustainable design and construction is contained in the SPG, 'Sustainable Buildings' (March 2003).

The City Council's Conservation Area Audits describe the character of conservation areas and include maps which indicate where roof extensions may and may not be acceptable.

Core Strategy Publication Draft 2009 (subject to agreement)

The Core Strategy promotes high quality, sustainable and inclusive design in all development but does not include specific reference to extensions and alterations.

Further Information

PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development (January 2005)

Supplement to PPS1: Planning and Climate Change (December 2007)

PPS22: Renewable Energy (August 2004)

PPG 15: Planning and the Historic Environment (September 1994)

The London Plan - consolidated with alterations since 2004 (February 2008)

Adopted Unitary Development Plan (January 2007)

Core Strategy Publication Draft

The agenda for the 'Extensions and Alterations' part of this workshop is as follows:

What should we do?

1. Should we maintain the longstanding, design criteria that are present in our existing policies? Or are the current policies too prescriptive?
2. What should our approach be towards underground extensions? Where these are not permitted development should we take a firmer approach to resisting such proposals under gardens and listed buildings?
3. Should we be more flexible in allowing renewable energy technology and equipment at the rear of buildings, e.g. solar panels and photovoltaics?
4. Should we instead concentrate on encouraging a reduction in the demand for energy within buildings, particularly in relation to buildings of historic interest?
5. Should we require more living roofs on existing buildings and new extensions?
6. Should we have a presumption against the installation of external mechanical plant on sustainability grounds except where it a) generates energy or b) can be demonstrated to be necessary for the reasonable use of the building?
7. Are there any other issues that have not been covered above?

8. Are there issues that the Council should be aware of in its lobbying process?

45 mins

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