

SOHO SOCIETY PLANNING POLICIES 2024

OUR OBJECTIVES

- To make Soho a better place for people to live, work and visit by preserving and enhancing the area's historic fabric, its existing character and its diversity of uses; and by improving its facilities, amenities and the sustainability of its environment.
- To protect the amenity and interests of local residents and the interests of independent businesses, traders and workers, where necessary, giving priority to local community needs over those of the tourist industry.
- To protect and enhance Soho as a home to a wide range of creative businesses.

WE WORK TO ACHIEVE THIS BY:

- Commenting on all the planning applications and listed building applications sent to us to consider.
- Seeking to protect and enhance the Soho Conservation Area.
- Seeking to ensure that applications contribute to Westminster's target of reducing carbon emissions by 2040 to net zero.
- Holding regular meetings with Council officers on policy matters.
- Receiving presentations from developers preferably when their plans are at an early stage.
- Liaising with the Society's licensing committee to seek to ensure that planning decisions and licensing decisions do not conflict.
- Welcoming, suggesting and supporting proposals which reduce overall noise levels, such as noise from air handling plant and nighttime waste collections. Please note we expect acoustic survey reports to be held on a number of nights including the expected quietest night (usually Sunday and Monday nights) and that WCC's noise reduction requirements should be achieved against the quietest noise levels achieved in the acoustic survey.
- Welcoming, suggesting and supporting all measures which reduce carbon emissions and make the area more sustainable.
- Pressing Westminster City Council to take firm measures, including compulsory purchase, where buildings or sites are used for anti-social purposes or where they remain vacant.
- Welcoming comments on planning issues from members of the Society.
- Campaigning on specific issues with the support of our members.

OUR DETAILED AIMS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

Our planning objectives are cross referenced to the policies (and the page numbers) which support our aims in the Soho Neighbourhood Plan (SNP), Westminster City Plan 2019-2040 (WCP) as these are the most relevant plans which themselves are in general conformity with the London Plan (LP) and National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES

- To oppose change of use from residential to other uses and normally to support the provision of new residential space where it does not involve significant loss of office and commercial space, especially that used by small and/or creative businesses. *WCP Policy 8C*
- To encourage the construction, restoration, rehabilitation and maintenance of social, intermediate and affordable rent residential accommodation with a mix of household sizes. *SNP Policies 3, 14 and 16;*
- We do not support new hotel uses especially where these involve the loss of permanent homes or of employment, cultural and leisure uses or erode the mixed-use character of the area. *WCP Policy 8D*

LIGHT INDUSTRIAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

- To support the construction, rehabilitation or changes of use which increase the provision of work-space which is made available to the creative industries and more specifically the craft, media, post production and creative industries and new start up small businesses. *SNP Policy 9; WCP Policy 14D*
- To oppose the loss of work-space for small and medium sized businesses.

OFFICES

- We will normally oppose the loss of small offices to other uses where there is likely to be an adverse impact on employment. We will oppose the conversion of existing office space into large floorplate new offices unless many desirable planning gains are included (see list below of acceptable planning gains) as part of the proposals and to encourage the inclusion of small scale office units in all permitted office developments. *SNP Policies 5, 6 and 7*
- We will oppose development proposals for hotel developments which result in the loss of office space and other commercial uses.

SHOPPING AND CATERING

To support existing small and specialist traders and encourage the inclusion in developments of small retail units. *SNP Policies 5 and 6; WCP Policy 20A and 20B*

- All applications for new shopfronts should show the entire building which they are situated in and those either side so that we can assess the suitability of the application in the context of the building and neighbouring ones. *SNP Policy 7*
- To oppose applications for fully open-able shop-fronts in shops restaurants and bars because of their potential to cause noise nuisance unless there are very clear and lasting conditions to control and prevent such nuisance. *WCP Policy 7A*
- To support the City Council's Cumulative Impact Area policies in relation to licensed premises. *WCP Policy 16A and 20C*
- To seek to ensure that all new class E and existing A3, A4 and A5 uses are restricted to the

‘core hours’ which are those hours when the premises may be open to the public as set out in WCC’s Statement of Licensing Policy, in summary: Monday to Thursday - 11.30pm, Friday and Saturday - midnight and Sundays - 10.30pm.

- To press for conditions relating to class E uses to be in binding legal agreements attaching to the permission.
- To seek to ensure that all such premises have on-site rubbish compacting or recycling facilities in order to improve the street environment and to press for the provision of internal onsite bottle crushers to limit the noise impact of glass collections by lorry. *SNP Policy 29; WCP Policy 7G*
- To ensure the use of pavements for tables and chairs and for outside drinking, provides sufficient free space for pedestrians is retained (normally at least 2 metres); there is no loss of residential amenity through potential noise nuisance; any pavement use does not take up too great a proportion of newly created public realm; tables and chairs are removed by 11pm and the tables and chairs are well managed to keep to their authorised area. To support full cost recovery charges for the commercial use of the public footpath or highway where it is used for outside drinking or for tables and chairs. *SNP Policy 12; WCP Policy 20A*

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

To support existing and new facilities such as local shops, schools, leisure centres, clinics, launderettes, health centres, doctor's and dentist's surgeries and to encourage Westminster City Council to treat Soho as a residential area in this respect. *WCP Policies 17A and 17C*

TRANSPORT AND PARKING

- To support initiatives aimed at improving and extending public transport *SNP Policy 15; WCP Policies 1.9, 7F and ;*
- To support appropriate pedestrian priority schemes, improved pavements, traffic calming measures and the provision of timed pedestrian phases on traffic lights. *SNP Policy 26; WCP Policy 2E and 24A*
- To oppose provision of additional commuter car parking space or any additional non-residential on-street parking other than for delivery purposes. *WCP Policy 1.9, 7F and 24C2*
- To press for rigorous monitoring and control of resident's parking by WCC to prevent fraud and abuse of the system.
- To support proposals for freight consolidation schemes and measures which discourage or replace noisy late-night collections and deliveries. *SNP Policy 22; WCP Policy 24C3 and 29A*
- To oppose the loss of the Poland Street and Brewer Street garages to other uses because these are useful spaces with the potential to house micro consolidation centres and other measures which may help to reduce traffic congestion. *SNP Policy 22*
- To oppose street widening schemes or the use of Soho by through traffic.
- To press for improved cycling facilities such as properly signed bicycle lanes, cycle racks,

cycle hire docking points, secure cycle storage, cycle phases on traffic lights etc. to be included in traffic management schemes. *SNP Policy 28; WCP Policy 24C2 and 25A*

- To support greater provision of spaces for commercial loading/unloading and motorcycle and scooter parking. *WCP Policy 27D*
- To support the provision of electric vehicle charging infrastructure. *WCP Policy 27D and 30C*

ENVIRONMENT

- The leader of WCC has reported that 86% of carbon emissions in the city are caused by energy used to power and heat buildings. To support measures which improve air quality and reduce the carbon footprint of the area in order to help to mitigate and adapt to a changing climate. We will particularly support new combined heat/cooling and power plants where they use energy more efficiently both on individual sites and where they can link a number of properties together as effective ways to help Soho towards meeting the 2050 target of net zero carbon use. *SNP Policy 19; WCP P1.8 and 36A*
- **To encourage the provision of more and better public toilets. *SNP Policy 13; WCP Policy 15I***
- To support the retention of existing buildings where demolition will impose an unacceptable burden on the local area and will not bring about sufficient environmental benefit. *SNP Policy 21*
- To support noise-insulation, pollution control and recycling measures, with particular regard to extract and ventilation plant. *WCP Policy 32A, 33A and 33C*
- To oppose the use of environmentally harmful products such as external space heaters and hot air curtains in place of doors on retail shops or other actions which waste resources such as leaving lights on unnecessarily. *SNP Policy 20; WCP Policy 33A and 36B*
- To monitor the impact of the Cross-Rail projects on Soho.
- To discourage the establishment of any noisy activities in Soho and to urge the City Council to reduce the ambient noise level. *SNP Policy 12; WCP Policy 33C*
- To discourage light pollution of the night sky. *WCP Policy 33B*
- **To ensure all development has appropriate facilities to prevent an reduce the dumping of waste and recycling on Soho's pavements. *WCP Policy 37B***

HISTORIC BUILDINGS

- To support the retention, repair and maintenance of existing listed buildings, and to support the listing of worthwhile buildings both as listed buildings and unlisted buildings of merit. *SNP Policy 1; WCP Policies 2F, 7C and 39A, G, K, and L*
- To press WCC to use Compulsory Purchase Orders if listed buildings remain neglected or vacant.
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TOWNSCAPE

- To support the maintenance and improvement of existing squares, public places, alleys and

courts etc. *SNP Policy 1; WCP Policy 2F, 20D and 40A*

- To resist the systematic raising of street heights (“canyonisation”) and to oppose any redevelopment scheme that is out of scale with the existing character of the area in size or design. *SNP Policy 2; WCP Policy 20A and 40A*
- To resist the siting of any new tall buildings within the Soho Conservation Area. *SNP Policy 2; WCP Policy 40A and 41A*
- To support and promote the planting of trees or other greening measures such as the creation of Quiet Zones where appropriate. *SNP Policies 23, 24 and 25; WCP Policy 7E and 34A and B*

FACADES

- To support the retention of authentic facades on each floor of a building to help keep a building’s integrity and authenticity. *SNP Policy 1; WCP Policies 39A, G, K and L*
- The Soho Conservation Area is typified by individual buildings on relatively small building plots and small floor plates. We support refurbishments and designs which support this character by emphasising the individuality of buildings and shop fronts rather than horizontal homogeneity. *SNP Policy 4; WCP Policy 7C, 20A and 20B*
- To oppose the use of fully openable shopfronts to reduce noise emissions and wasted heat by supporting all doors and rotating doorways normally falling closed. *SNP Policy 20; WCP Policy 7A*

Each application is looked at on its merits and, where there are truly exceptional circumstances, we may be prepared to accept a scheme that does not completely fit these policies.

PLANNING GAINS

(Not in order of precedence)

When deciding whether to support or oppose a planning application the Society will count the provision of any of the following as a community benefit to be balanced against the disruptions and losses consequent upon any planning permission being implemented.

Applications which provide the following through Section 106 agreements or otherwise will stand the best chance of our support - if none of these criteria are met then alternative gains will be sought:

- Permanent low rent or otherwise affordable residential accommodation with separate access; completed before commercial premises are occupied; inclusion of ground floor storage for prams, disability equipment, bicycles etc.; balconies; roof gardens. Where off site affordable housing is provided it should be within Soho or within the vicinity of it, unless there are exceptional circumstances. Where the only solution is that payments are made in lieu of housing to the Affordable Housing Fund these should be recorded as having been generated in the West End Ward and then used in the ward or the vicinity to provide or

- contribute to affordable housing schemes.
- On-site waste storage and recycling facilities (including glass crushers) for the users of the particular site..
 - Greening measures including rainwater capture, reducing rainwater run off, CHP and CCHP micro-generation plants and other measures which mitigate and adapt to changes in climate.
 - Traffic calming measures, pedestrian refuges; pavement widening and other measures to enhance pedestrian comfort and safety.
 - New loading and unloading bays to ease the problems of servicing and deliveries.
 - Bicycle racks, lanes and other facilities for cyclists.
 - Special features - fountains, trees, green-walls or roofs, increased biodiversity, seats, works of art, open spaces, signage etc.
 - Affordable market barrow storage in the Berwick St and Rupert St areas and/or Section 106 protected light industrial accommodation.
 - Permanent, free public lavatories.
 - Public, social and environment facilities, particularly at ground floor level.
 - The provision at concessionary rents of ground floor space for community use, such as meeting rooms, social clubs, creche etc. in all new non-residential developments exceeding 2000m sq. lettable area, or a financial contribution from the developer in lieu.
 - The provision of electric vehicle charging infrastructure.
 - Other planning gains will be considered on merit.

This Planning Mandate is prepared by the Soho Society's Planning and Environment committee, circulated to the membership and was first approved at an Annual General Meeting in 1991. It has been revised since a number of times, most recently in 2020, the revisions in each case being endorsed by the Society's membership at its Annual General Meeting.