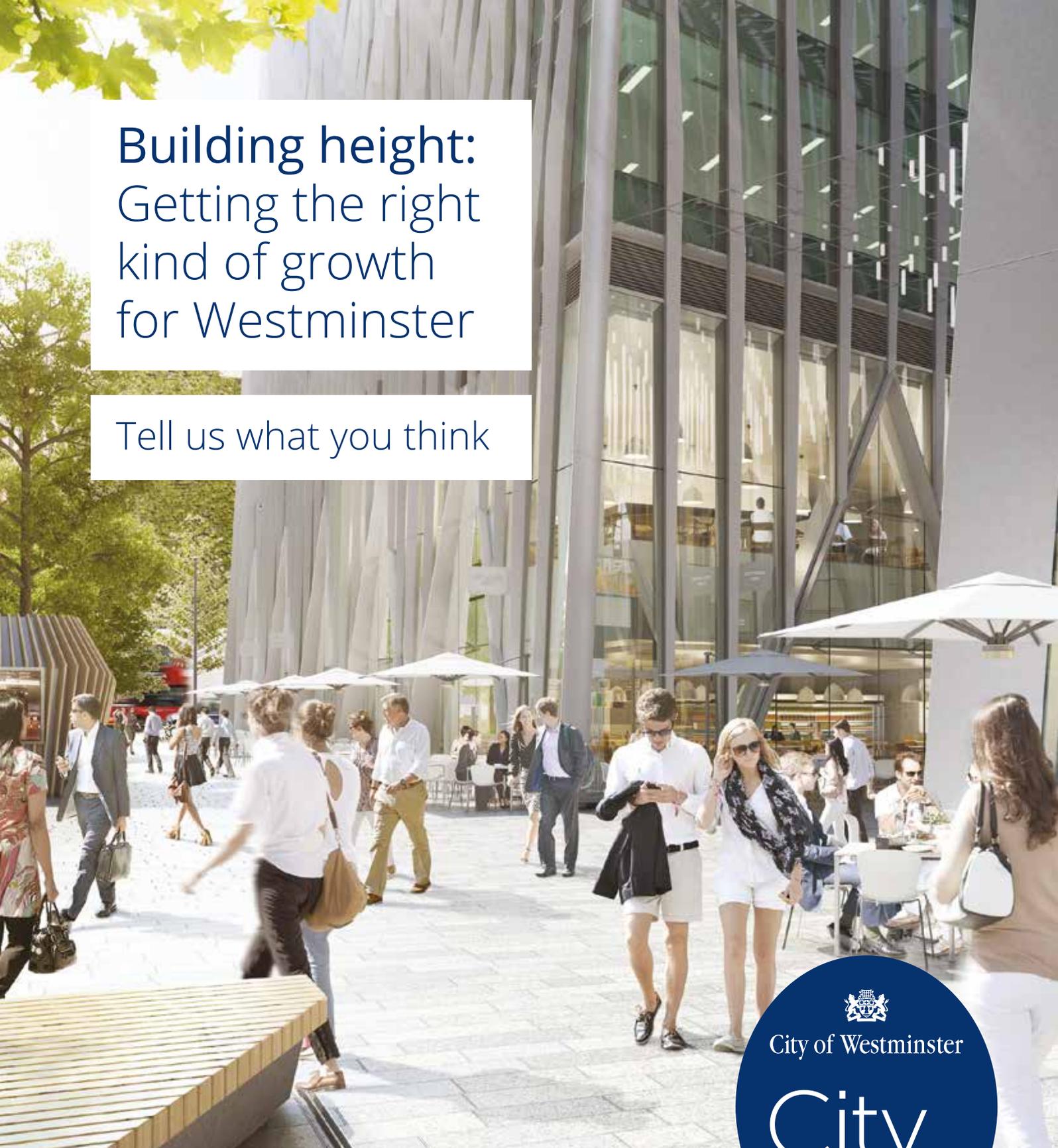


# Building height: Getting the right kind of growth for Westminster

Tell us what you think



City of Westminster

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for  
All

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# Introduction

Over the last thirty years we believe that our policies have very successfully enabled growth in Westminster, protecting and making the most of our world-class historic environment, which makes Westminster a unique place to work, live and visit and of which we are fiercely proud.

Growth is both inescapable and vital to our future success. London's population and economy continue to grow and the demands and targets for residential and commercial growth increase in step.

We are committed to delivering the right kind of growth – growth that works for all residents, businesses, city and country both now and in the future. Westminster must remain an unrivalled place to live, work or visit.

This is already one of the most developed places in the country. Demands on land are high; its price reflects this. Delivering the numbers of jobs and homes growth will bring means we have to look at ways of making best use of the sites we have, including building higher and denser – and considering the scope for tall buildings, while protecting the places and spaces that make Westminster special. Anything we do should seek to protect our heritage and environment, improve our residents' quality of life and make sure our communities benefit from their city's development.

In all of this there will be a balance and a compromise to be struck. Achieving all this requires leadership from the council, but this has to be built on shared objectives and joint work across a range of partners. This approach underpins our City for All vision – setting clear priorities with residents, partners and businesses, as we work collaboratively in the best interests of the city. That is why we are starting a discussion about how to encourage growth that delivers for Westminster's people and enjoys the broadest support. We will use the result to help draw up planning and other policies to be clear about the kind of growth we want to encourage and how it should be delivered.

We want to hear from as many people as possible about how we can encourage and manage growth to make sure Westminster is a place we are proud to hand on to future generations. In particular, we want your views about building height. The simple questionnaire at the end of this document will help inform our thinking and allow us to bring forward detailed suggestions for formal public consultation later this year.

Your comments and suggestions will help us inform Westminster's ambition to deliver the 'right kind' of growth. We look forward to hearing from you.

## We look forward to hearing from you.

**Cllr Daniel Astaire**  
Cabinet Member for Planning and Public Realm



## What are we doing?

Westminster will continue to grow and change. Over the coming decades we will have to find space for more jobs and homes to meet the needs of a growing population and economy.

Being at the heart of a world city there is no room for a "no growth" option – the important thing is that it is the right kind of growth and in the right place. This means finding ways of ensuring it helps deliver opportunities and an improving quality of life for Westminster's people; a high quality public realm fit for a twenty-first century world city; and protection of our priceless heritage – in short, to ensure we have a city we are proud to hand on to future generations.

Our overriding objective is to deliver the 'right kind' of growth which brings the maximum benefits for residents, workers, visitors and businesses, whilst minimising the detrimental effects – and continues to do so in the long term. This will run through our City Plan and other policies, as part of our vision to create a City for All. That's why we're asking people to complete a comprehensive questionnaire which will then inform our thinking and allow us to bring forward detailed policies for formal public consultation later this year that have broad support.

Our city is already densely developed. We rightly have strict protection for our parks, open spaces and heritage, but this increases the demand for the places that can be developed. Sites in these places are scarce and expensive. All this means we have to be imaginative and innovative in making the best use of these sites – finding ways of enabling growth and managing it both to deliver the economic and social benefits we need and to enhance the environment, protect our heritage and help create a high quality city.

While there are still some larger-scale opportunities in places like Paddington and Victoria, the scale of growth means we have to look wider. In particular, there is potential to get more out of sites by having more intense development, building higher than at present – or where appropriate, considering significantly taller buildings. At the other end of the scale there can be careful adaptation or extension of existing buildings. We need to look at all these options – whether individual higher or tall buildings, clusters of them, or increasing densities by adding additional storeys to existing buildings in the right locations. The council is not alone in looking at this – national government and the Mayor of London are also encouraging these kinds of approaches.

Whatever we do, the council remains committed to encouraging excellent design and beautiful buildings that not only represent the very best contemporary architecture, but also showcase our amazing city and leave behind a positive legacy for generations to come. We will continue to 'raise the bar' in terms of urban design, architectural quality and environmental performance for buildings of any scale or size. For higher buildings, this means striving for high quality, sustainable design and innovative architecture in the right locations which contribute to the London experience and respect local distinctiveness. It also means that aspects such as daylight, outlook, air quality, noise, and wind tunnel effects must be addressed carefully from the outset to deliver places people are glad to live and work in. Although the survey focuses on building height, there are obviously other considerations such as places and buildings, and how they interact. Another important aspect is good connections to public transport.

# Why are we doing this?

Westminster's unique position in the heart of a growing global city presents a raft of challenges and competing priorities in creating an attractive and sustainable environment that our residents, workers, visitors and businesses can all enjoy and thrive in. One such challenge is the future growth of London and what this means for Westminster, in particular:

- London's population is expected to reach 10.5 million people by 2041 as the capital remains the fastest-growing region in the UK
- Westminster's residential population is projected to grow from 226,000 to 262,000 by 2036; meaning we have to find 21,000 new homes for those who want to live here
- We also have to find an additional two million square metres of business floorspace to accommodate an additional 77,000 jobs and to make up for the significant amount of office space we have lost to housing since 2005
- A staggering one million people currently travel in to the City each day and it is predicted that the opening in 2018 of the new Elizabeth Line that runs east to west through Westminster will see annual passenger numbers of 200m
- Westminster is one of the nation's most important economic assets; our 47,000 businesses provide 697,000 jobs and generate £55.7 billion annual GVA (15% of London's and 4.3% of the nation's) – larger than the City of London's contribution.

We cannot ignore these Londonwide growth trends or how these will affect Westminster in the years ahead. There will be more people living, working and visiting here and we have to find ways of accommodating them sustainably. There will be no more land; we have to make sure we make the best use of what we have.

That's why it's crucial that we have a viable City Plan with policies that work for Westminster, being clear about how we will encourage, manage and benefit from growth, while ensuring that the unique character of Westminster is preserved for future generations – that it is, and remains, a City for All.



# Things we would like you to think about

A number of major cities across the globe accommodate growth by building upwards. But few have the kind of outstanding heritage that Westminster does, reflecting its two thousand years of history:

- 75% of the City falls within designated conservation areas
- The Palace of Westminster is a World Heritage Site visited by millions of people and an international symbol of democracy
- There are 11,000 listed buildings and structures, many cherished parks, squares and open spaces and, of course, the Royal Parks
- Westminster's central London location means it is touched by a number of protected 'strategic views' which seek to preserve the view of a specific place or historic building, including the Palace of Westminster, from locations across London. These may include the area behind the place or building concerned.
- This all contributes to Westminster and London's distinctiveness, offering an unrivalled and unique ambience which attracts investment, businesses, visitors and workers from across the globe.

Our approach to growth must both deliver economic benefits and opportunities and make the most of the scope it gives to sustain and enhance Westminster's uniqueness. We have to maximise both kinds of benefit so that future larger and higher buildings contribute in the best possible way to an attractive and balanced Westminster. One way of doing this is to build higher – whether by adding a few floors above existing roof levels or by building significantly taller buildings.



## What we want you to do:

We also want to know what people think about higher buildings – whether those a few floors higher or those that can be described as “tall”. We know it's an issue that many people are passionate about and views are often polarised.

We would like to try and find a middle ground. There are many advantages to increased height – there is limited land for development in Westminster, land prices are high and the demand for development is increasing. Building higher can be a strategic approach to get the most out of sites with high level of public transport. Higher buildings can play an important role in stimulating investment and regeneration and can act as a 'visual signpost' that contributes to the image of London and signals that an area is positive towards change. They can be more sustainable, deliver more jobs, homes and investment in the public realm and transport system and create better life chances for local people and their families.

Some people do not like higher buildings because of their design or the impact they have on London's skyline and views. Some wouldn't mind if a higher building was for housing and not offices or a hotel – others would like the opposite. Some feel differently about buildings that are a few floors higher than their neighbours and those that are really tall. We'd like to know what you like, or don't like, about higher and tall buildings. Which ones do you like in London and why? Should they be for residential use, mixed use or for commercial uses only?

Do you agree they are best in clusters in certain areas, for example in our three opportunity areas? What we are not thinking about is potentially putting tall buildings in any location across Westminster. That has never been our approach and never will be. The continued careful management and stewardship of Westminster is paramount. No development will be allowed to compromise the strategic viewing corridors; bring demonstrable harm to our conservation areas or listed buildings; or to affect our World Heritage Site.

Your suggestions will help us inform Westminster's ambition to deliver the 'right kind' of growth. We want to hear from residents' groups, planners, developers, architects, landowners and businesses, but it is very important that everyone has a voice; including individuals, families and neighbourhoods. The changes that are made will affect all our communities for many years to come.

To assist with this discussion, we have set out some suggested growth principles and some general questions we would like to hear your views about.



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