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Leader of the Council

Richard Cutt
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Society Forum (WASF)

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Dear Richard and WASF members

Thank you for taking the time to write and share your concerns. The experience of the past 18 months has shown us all how we need to have open and honest dialogue if we are to tackle the challenges facing our city, and I am grateful you felt able to share these issues so we can address them together. I am also extremely grateful for the voluntary effort put in by all amenity societies and WASF as a group to make our city a better place to live.

The issues you raise in your letter are really important to me, my Cabinet and all my colleagues at the Westminster City Council. I am totally committed to running a council which works with its residents to take decisions and this means we need a strong relationship with local amenity societies. I have made this clear both to Cabinet and officers in the weeks since your letter. I am committed to this because I know that we take our best decisions in collaboration with communities.

On this note, the council is currently recruiting a new Director of Communities to bring more consistency and higher standards to how we engage and consult with stakeholders across the city. Our expectation is that this role works across all services to make sure we are a council which listens to and really hears what people are saying about their local areas. I have asked that one of their first tasks is to work with WASF and other stakeholders in the city to review how we consult and develop a better, more consistent standard which is in line with your final request in the letter. I absolutely believe that this needs to be a joint piece of work to be truly effective and I'd appreciate your views on the best way to approach this. I have asked all members of my Cabinet to contribute as they will either be running services which you have concerns over e.g. Highways, Licensing or Planning, or they have broader responsibilities or experience around community engagement and consultation.

Given the extent of the issues raised in the letter it would be really helpful to discuss these issues in person and my office have already been in touch with you to arrange a meeting. I hope we can use this time to discuss how we can improve dialogue between WASF and the council rather than going into detailed discussions on the specific projects you use to illustrate this core problem. I have provided some detail below on the specific issues and we are of course happy to discuss each these



with a wider group whenever suitable. We also have our next WASF-WCC call coming up on Tuesday 21 September where we can discuss.

On alfresco, the council has repeatedly committed to removing all temporary schemes involving road closures or barriers in the road/parking suspensions after 30 September, unless there is clear support from local residents for continued schemes. In some areas of the city, such as St. John's Wood, al fresco has been phenomenally popular, so our approach has followed the wishes of the local community rather than applying a blanket policy across the city.

I am also clear that ETOs are never a permanent solution and should always be transitioned into more conventional mechanisms, including with the appropriate consultation. ETOs are a useful tool, but we need to use them in a measured way either in genuinely extraordinary circumstances or with the clear consent of the local community.

Your letter uses the Marble Arch Mound to make a wider point around the Oxford Street Programme. There is currently an internal review going on into the Mound and it would therefore be inappropriate to comment on it this at stage, although a conversation would be useful on the wider Oxford Street Programme.

As I noted above, we have our next, more general amenity society meeting scheduled for 21st September. I recall that WASF were going to meet without the council in advance of these to discuss and propose agenda items rather than the council setting the direction for each meeting now we are moving beyond the pandemic. I would really welcome such a move so the dialogue becomes more two way. Alternatively, if you have already reinstated your previous WASF meetings I would be very happy to attend those with colleagues and officers, as happened in the past.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Rachael Robathan
Leader of the Council
Westminster City Council