

Date of Full Council meeting	Question	Response
Wednesday 13 November 2024	<p>A Freedom of Information response disclosed that WCC Pension Fund invests millions in firms who trade with the Israeli State. In September, a UNGA resolution called on states to cease provision of arms, munitions and related equipment to Israel.</p> <p>What steps is Westminster Council taking to adopt an ethical investment policy and to follow other investors such as USS (UK's largest pension fund) and heed the UNGA resolution?</p>	<p>The Chair of the Pension Fund Committee stated that the Council recognises that the ongoing conflict in the Middle East is tragic, and something which we know many people have different and strongly held political views on.</p> <p>As a Pension Fund Committee, our objective is to ensure that our members receive the pensions they are entitled to (in retirement) by making prudent investment decisions, guided by our Responsible Investment Statement. This is known as the fiduciary duty.</p> <p>The authoritative legal advice to Councils, on their fiduciary duty, is that while investment decisions can be influenced by ethical concerns, the power of investment must be exercised for investment (not political) purposes.</p> <p>Accordingly, while Westminster can (and does) use investments to pursue goals like decarbonisation (because this is in long-term interests of the Fund and its members), Councils cannot use Pension Funds as a vehicle to implement their own independent foreign policy.</p> <p>And this point is crucial. Your question mentions the Universities Superannuation Scheme. The USS has recently reduced its exposure to the Middle East, but in a public statement they clarified:</p> <p>'Some commentators have stated, or implied, that we have excluded Israel from our investment portfolio. We have not. It is also wrong to state, or imply, that our decisions were made for anything other than financial reasons'.</p> <p>From Westminster's perspective, our exposure to the Middle East is negligible because we invest in funds rather than specific share holdings. Nonetheless, we do view the ongoing conflict as a financial risk and while – to date – this risk has not prompted us to take any specific investment decisions, we actively monitor the situation and will continue to act in the best interests of our members and in accordance with our Responsible Investment Statement.</p>
Wednesday 13 November 2024	<p>Plant-based diets result in 75% less GHG emissions and land-use than diets with 100g of meat daily. They cut wildlife destruction 66% and water-use 54%. An analysis by the Office of Health Economics shows that plant-based diets would save the NHS £6.7bn yearly, with 2.1 million fewer cases of disease. Research consistently shows that local governments are trusted more than national politicians making the council well-positioned to introduce plant-based initiatives and deliver public education.</p> <p>Please could Westminster Council follow the lead of 33 towns and cities worldwide, including Edinburgh, Lambeth, and Amsterdam by endorsing the Plant Based Treaty and creating a plant-based action plan?</p>	<p>As a council, we are very supportive of actions to address the climate and nature crises, and we are working hard to combat the crises locally.</p> <p>At the moment, we are still considering whether or not to sign the Plant Based Treaty but we do recognise the many positive environmental impacts associated with some of the actions and ideas that the treaty recommends, and have already independently actioned some of the proposals in the Treaty itself, including declaring Climate and Ecological Emergencies, designing public information campaigns to raise awareness about the climate, and giving residents a chance to invest in sustainable projects and green initiatives via our Green Investment Scheme.</p> <p>We also recognise the beneficial health impacts that can come from plant-based diets and are working on tackling challenges in our food system. We are proud to support the pan-London 'Eat like a Londoner' Campaign, part of the One World Living programme, which encourages households to reduce their food waste and eat a more plant-based diet, and we work our Climate Champions in North Paddington to promote sustainable food and diets wherever appropriate within the local community.</p> <p>We have also just published the Council's first Greening and Biodiversity Strategy, which will form the council's framework for all our subsequent environmental work. We have supported 30 local greening projects through the greening Westminster Fund, delivering over £375,000 of funding. We are creating a nature reserve in the North Paddington area, targeting up to 30% Biodiversity Net Gain for all new developments in the city (significantly more than the government's current requirement of 10%) and we're working to build partnerships across the City to build our capability to deliver real change in Westminster.</p> <p>In summary, we want to assure you that tackling climate change is one of the most important priorities for the Council, and we are working incredibly hard to deliver a Fairer Environment.'</p>
Wednesday 13 November 2024	<p>In light of the new Ebury Bridge Road redevelopment, please can the Council review traffic access to this area? The system of no right turns and no left turns on surrounding roads means that the vast majority of traffic, bicycles, cars and large lorries, can only access via Pimlico Road and the narrow St Barnabas street. This is creating significant congestion and danger to pedestrians. Has the Council coordinated with Kensington & Chelsea Council on these arrangements?</p>	<p>We understand the banned turns being referred to relate to the Transport for London strategic road network and are not controlled by the City Council. We are aware the banned turns were installed as a safety measure. As far as we are aware Transport for London did consult with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea before implementing the changes on Grosvenor Road.</p>

<p>Wednesday 13 November 2024</p>	<p>I seek clarity on how Westminster Council can allow the opaque process surrounding Jubilee Hall Gym's lease surrender to continue unchecked. Jubilee Hall has served as a key community asset in Covent Garden, providing vital health, wellness, and social benefits, particularly to vulnerable groups.</p> <p>How does the council reconcile its commitments to transparency, community welfare, and public consultation with the lack of accountability demonstrated by Jubilee Hall Trust's trustees?</p> <p>Why was no public consultation held before this significant decision, and what oversight does the Council maintain over such impactful moves?</p> <p>Has the Council explored alternative strategies to secure the gym's future without lease surrender or sale?</p> <p>Given the implications for community health, well-being, and heritage, I urge the council to pause this process, hold a public forum to assess community needs, and work collaboratively to preserve this essential facility.</p>	<p>The Cabinet Member for City Management and Air Quality responded by stating that the Council recognises how much the Jubilee Hall means to the community in Covent Garden. The hall was saved from demolition in the 1970s to the great credit of local campaigners. The lease on the hall was granted on a peppercorn rent to the Jubilee Hall charity which runs a gym in the space. The freehold of the building is owned by Shaftesbury Capital. The Charity no longer wants to operate the space and plans to surrender the lease to Shaftesbury in return for a cash payment.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for City Management and Air Quality met with both the CEO of the charity and senior management from Shaftesbury to press the community's case that the gym should remain in the Hall. The charity is adamant that the gym is not commercially viable and that it can pursue its objectives more effectively elsewhere. Shaftesbury say they have offered alternative space nearby if the charity wants to relocate the gym. The Council's director of leisure services has also spoken with the charity to offer support.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the campaigners have very sensibly applied that the Hall be listed as an asset of community value. Officers are looking at the application now and their recommendation is expected shortly. In normal circumstances, an ACV will give community groups the right to pause the sale of an asset to give them time to put together a counter offer. However, in the case of the Jubilee Hall, the transaction is not a sale of an asset but the surrender of a lease. The Council's legal advice is that granting of an ACV would not call a halt to the process. That won't affect the decision on whether or not we grant an ACV, just that it is not expected to be as effective as it normally would be.</p> <p>The Council has no formal role in the operation of charities or any commercial arrangements between a charity and its landlord. The decision on whether to operate the gym or to surrender the lease is a question for the charity and its trustees alone.</p> <p>The trustees of Jubilee Hall Gym must abide by the rules governing charities – any concerns about their actions should be directed to the charity commission. They have the regulatory powers to intervene. The Council does not. Neither can the Council compel them to run a consultation. What the Council can do, is continue to strongly encourage the parties to sit down with the community and reach a common agreement on how the gym can continue, either in its current location or elsewhere. Either Cllr Dimoldenberg or Cllr Sanquest would be delighted to take part in these meetings.</p>	