

Summary guide: Public Realm Guidance Supplementary Planning Document

October 2024

Westminster City Council is updating its public realm guidance for the whole of Westminster. The document provides guidance on the implementation of City Plan policies and other regulatory requirements for public realm schemes and developments which impact the public realm. It is to be used by anyone with an interest in our public realm. The document is called a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and once adopted, it will be an important consideration when making planning decisions.

The draft SPD is split into six main sections:

- Section one is an introduction to the document, what it covers and the key principles that have been drafted as a new 'Westminster Code'.
- Section two covers the national and local policy framework within which the Public Realm Guidance sits.
- Section three covers our approach to Equality, Accessibility, and Inclusive Design in the Public Realm
- Section four provides subject specific guidance relating to individual features within the public realm.
- Section five is the glossary of terms.
- Section six is the links and information sources used to inform the SPD.

Sections three and four highlight the City Plan policies which the guidance addresses, provide context for the subject matter, and in yellow highlighted boxes, set out the guidance which applies to that subject. Cross-referencing is provided throughout, with links to existing strategies and further information sources.

The below provides an overview of the content of the draft SPD which is being prepared for public consultation running between 7th October to 18th November:

1 Introduction

1.1 The Public Realm and where this guidance applies

- **The Public Realm:** This section defines the 'Public realm' as referring to all the publicly accessible space for people's movement and interaction. This includes streets, pavements, squares and open spaces.
- **Guidance for better Public Realm:** This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) builds on policies within Westminster's local development plan and sets out Westminster City Council's approach to the design, maintenance and use of its public realm. The development plan includes London-wide policy (The London Plan 2021) and City-wide policy (The City Plan 2019-2040). The development plan also includes neighbourhood plans which are locally, distinct policies developed by neighbourhood forums. Guidance throughout the SPD will refer specifically to London-wide and City-wide policies, but should also be applied when implementing Neighbourhood plan policy, where applicable.
- **Guidance for All:** This document contains subject-specific guidance that provides advice to all those who influence the public realm's appearance and function, helping to strike a balance between the often conflicting demands on our streets and open spaces. It should be used when preparing and evaluating planning applications and new projects that impact on the public realm.

1.2 Vision, Objectives and The Westminster Code

- **Creating Positive Impact:** This section sets out the priority criteria which proposals for the public realm will be considered against. This includes public realm proposals that results in positive impact on the environment and the safe movement for all public realm users through sustainable modes of transport.
- **The Westminster Code:** Public realm interventions in Westminster should be in line with the 'Westminster Code'. This is a set of five guiding principles flowing from existing city plan policies that ensure continuity in design standards, maintenance, our response to the climate emergency and how we support health and wellbeing.

2 Strategic and Policy Context

2.1 National Context

- **National Level Guidance:** An overview is provided of The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), National Design Guide, and the National Model Design Code and Guidance Notes for Design Codes, which form a repertory of guidance documents that should be read when developing public realm schemes.
- **Relevant NPPF Policies:** While not containing specific policies on the public realm, the policies set out in chapters 8 (Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities), 9 (Promoting Sustainable Transport), 12 (Achieving Well-designed and Beautiful Places), 15 (Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment), and 16 (Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment) of the NPPF are relevant to public realm initiatives.
- National legislation and related guidance notes and strategies are referenced throughout the draft SPD, with signposting provided with links to further information.

2.2 London Context

This section sets out the policies that apply within London.

- **The London Plan:** This is Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London and sets out a framework for how London will develop over the next 20-25 years.
 - **Creating Strong and Inclusive Communities:** The London Plan contains policies (D5, D8 and GG1) that specifically set out the public realm's functions and principles in creating strong and inclusive communities.
- **Healthy Streets for London:** TfL's Healthy Streets for London framework proposes 10 indicators of what make streets attractive places.



2.3 Local Policies and Strategies

This section summarises Westminster’s local policies and strategies:

- **Fairer Westminster:** Public realm interventions should consider the City Council’s Fairer Westminster Strategy. The strategy aims to build an inclusive city where everyone feels safe and welcome regardless of their background and outlines five main ambitions which support the council’s decision making. In line with these ambitions is a list of key deliverables which should be considered when planning public realm schemes within the city.
- **Westminster’s City Plan 2019-2040:** Westminster’s City plan (also called the Local Plan) provides broad policy guidelines that impact the public realm. Key City Plan policies for public realm schemes are listed on page 15 of the SPD. A key function of the SPD is to further elaborate on these policies, guiding users on how these policies should be implemented.
- **Climate and Ecological Emergency:** The City Council’s declaration of a climate emergency has led to an Action Plan for achieving a Net Zero city by 2040. Measures proposed include a travel hierarchy that informs transport-related guidelines in this SPD. Additionally, all Westminster public realm projects must adhere to using low-carbon methods and materials. The ecological emergency declaration commits the council to the delivery of biodiversity net gain, influencing open space provisions, tree planting, and housing design in the city. These requirements are reflected in the subject specific guidance in section four of the draft SPD.
- **Other key strategy documents:** A list of key strategy documents from the City Council, both developed and emerging, is presented. These strategies should be considered when planning public realm proposals.

2.4 Local Context

- This section describes the local conditions where the SPD guidance will apply. The SPD does not seek to provide guidance for specific geographic locations with Westminster, but instead sets out the principles for decision making across the city.

- **Respecting Local Distinctiveness:** The SPD references, the Thames riverside, Westminster's 56 conservation areas (covering 78% of the city), 85 London Squares, 23 Historic England registered parks and gardens, five Royal Parks, and a World Heritage Site. It also references its vibrant and diverse residential neighbourhoods, and how public realm proposals should honour their distinctiveness and character.
- **Enhancing Opportunity Areas and Town Centres:** The London Plan identifies Paddington, Tottenham Court Road, and Victoria as areas with growth potential. Public realm improvements will alleviate congestion, enhance sense of place, and improve visitor experience. In addition, Westminster has a diverse network of town centres which are home to our major retail centres. Public realm in Town Centres should prioritise pedestrian movement, declutter streets as much as possible and consider servicing requirements.
- **Supporting West End Intensification:** The West End is home to globally renowned shopping streets, institutions, and attractions. Public realm interventions should protect its unique townscape and heritage, while managing the exceptionally high footfall. Material choice and decluttering are crucial to maintain street infrastructure resilience, with guidance provided on these under section four below.
- **Road Networks:** Within Westminster there is a defined road hierarchy setting out different types of roads. The Transport for London Road Network, the Westminster Strategic Road Network, Local Roads, High Streets and Local Centres, and Residential Streets.

3 Equality, Accessibility, and Inclusion in the Public Realm

This section provides a high-level overview of the equalities framework and elements of public realm schemes which may disproportionately impact people from protected groups. Whilst guidance regarding accessibility and inclusion is integrated throughout the topic based guidance, this section highlights its importance and links to Inclusive Design Guidance produced by Mott MacDonald and will accompany the SPD as an appendix. The Inclusive Design Guidance provides a thorough evidence base, external stakeholder feedback from members of protected groups on their experience in the public realm, and 'Inclusive Design Guidance' tailored for Westminster.

3.1 Equality, Accessibility, and Inclusive Design

The guidance within Section three is summarised below, and is applied throughout the topic based guidance of the SPD:

- **Designing for Safety and Accessibility:** Westminster, with its diverse population, requires a public realm that prioritises safety, accessibility, and wellbeing. A permeable and legible public realm benefits individuals with disabilities and protected characteristics. When designing the public realm, it is essential to consider the needs and expectations of potential users (including residents, workers, and visitors), and the impact it may have on them, while ensuring that no one feels excluded from these spaces.
- **Designing for health, wellbeing and climate-resilience:** Public realm design should promote mental and physical health by fostering social interaction, reducing loneliness, and encouraging active travel and access to green spaces. It should also enhance climate resilience through shaded

areas and flood-resistant infrastructure, ensuring spaces are safe, accessible, and comfortable for people of all ages and abilities.

- **Eliminating Barriers to Travel:** Public realm design should promote sustainable transport choices. People's confidence and willingness to travel is influenced both by physical barriers and the perceived availability of travel information. Both aspects should be considered when planning public realm interventions.
- **Inclusivity as Core Consideration:** Inclusivity should be integral to the public realm design process from the outset. Particular attention should be given to the range and requirements of users, and how these may vary depending on the time of day or time of year. Barriers to accessibility and inclusion should be removed or mitigated, including ensuring safe, level access into sites and buildings. The guidance sets out the requirement for Equality Impact Assessments to be undertaken, and for inclusive engagement with those most likely to be impacted by schemes to be undertaken to inform scheme design.

4 Topic Based Guidance

The following 15 chapters form the bulk of the SPD. The beginning of each chapter lists the key City Plan policies which the guidance addresses. Context for the subject matter is also outlined, referring to relevant legislation or policy and providing further contextual details which shape our overall approach to the public realm. The yellow highlighted boxes set out the guidance which applies to that subject matter. Cross-referencing is provided throughout, with links to existing strategies and further information sources.

The yellow highlighted boxes within the SPD set out the main guidance which applies to the subject matter. Consultees will be asked to pay particular attention to these yellow guidance boxes when providing comment on the draft SPD.

We want to know if the guidance points are easy to understand, easy to follow and for consultees to prioritise what is important for guiding public realm schemes.

4.1 Highway Space, Road Safety and Parking

- **The Highways Act 1980:** The Highways Act sets out national legislation dealing with the management and operation of our road network, including the creation and improvement of roads and related structures, and access rights.
- **Prioritising Movement:** The SPD emphasises that the primary purpose of the highway is to facilitate people's movement. While other subsidiary functions like cycle parking and commercial uses could be incorporated, this primary role should take precedence. The design of footway should consider the needs of the pedestrians, particularly those with accessibility needs.
- **Ensuring Comfort and Safety:** This section provides guidance on footway/carriageway widths, crossing design, kerbside activities, and highway reallocation, to ensure the comfort of highway users and fulfil the City Council's responsibility as the local highway authority in promoting road safety.
- **Preserving Highway Land:** The City Council will generally resist the loss of highway land, especially footways.

4.2 Cycling / Active Travel

- **Promoting Sustainable Transport:** Existing city policies prioritise a modal shift away from private car use in favour of cycling, without compromising pedestrians' needs. Developments should create a safe and accessible environment for cyclists. This section of the SPD focusses on cycle routes, whilst guidance for the placement and style of cycle parking infrastructure, stands and hangars, is included under the Street Furniture sections below.
- **Enhancing Cycling Infrastructure:** Public realm schemes should integrate or improve connectivity to safe, permeable, and legible cycle routes. For developments near key transport nodes or expected to generate high footfall, increased cycle parking provision should be considered.

4.3 Green and Blue Infrastructure

- **Enhancing Urban Resilience:** Green and blue infrastructure (GBI) not only contributes to our ecosystem and biodiversity, but also to people's health and well-being. It is crucial to provide GBI in a joined-up and easily accessible manner.
- **Incorporating GBI in Developments:** Where possible and feasible, all development schemes should consider the City Council's declaration of climate and ecological emergencies and contribute to the city's GBI.
- **Maintenance and Management:** The draft SPD reflects that trees and Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are principal components of the city's GBI and should be well managed and maintained to maximise their benefits. In particular, opportunities for SuDS should be considered for all public realm developments as even small schemes could contribute to the reduction of flood risks.

4.4 Microclimate and user comfort

- **Maximising User Comfort:** Microclimate influences people's comfort and their dwell time in the public realm. Public realm stakeholders should consider both natural and human-induced conditions shaping the microclimate and take proactive action to mitigate adverse ones.
- **Manipulating Natural Conditions:** Careful material choice and development layout design could be some of the ways to manipulate microclimatic conditions such as wind, air quality and solar exposure, and mitigate negative impacts like glare and pollution.
- **Creating High-Quality Soundscape:** Some noise sources in Westminster are uncontrollable. The draft SPD sets out measures such as barriers, screening and absorption which can be used to reduce their impacts.

4.5 Street Furniture

- **General Principles:** A key principle running through the SPD is the need to minimise street clutter. The draft guidance advises that street furniture should be legible (generally black) and allow sufficient space for pedestrian movement, i.e. that it must not be placed in the 2m wide (applicable to most streets) pedestrian clear zone. The design and choice of street furniture materials should facilitate efficient servicing. When introducing new street furniture items, guidance advises that these should be multifunctional where possible, and that their cumulative impact is also considered.

- **Wayfinding:** The use of clear and consistent wayfinding signage is encouraged. Signs should preferably follow the ‘Legible London’ format, the application of which would require TfL approval. The guidance seeks to discourage bespoke / inconsistent signage which may cause clutter and/or confusion.
- **Cycle Parking:** The city’s cycle parking facilities comprise hangars (usually for long-stay purposes in residential areas) and on-street ‘Sheffield’ stands (for short-stay parking near retailers, offices, public buildings, and public transport nodes). Guidance is provided for their design and placement.
- **Planters:** The guidance seeks to deter the installation of planters where in-ground planting is preferred. Use of planters should only be as a temporary intervention of last resort. They are not considered sustainable and can attract undesirable behaviour.
- **Tables, Chairs and Fixed Public Seating:** Seats/benches (not linked to licensed premises) in high-demand areas could encourage longer stays in the public realm. They should be positioned invitingly so as to enable users’ enjoyment of the public realm, without impeding movement. Guidance is provided about their design and placement.
- **Drinking Fountains:** Drinking fountains should be placed in high footfall locations. Fountains should be kept clean and well-maintained, and contactless fountains are preferred for hygiene. Three water quality tests per month and foul water drainage systems are essential.
- **Waste Disposal Facilities:** the draft SPD specifies that well-maintained bins need to be readily available to prevent littering in the public realm. They should be placed strategically in high-footfall areas but avoid high security areas and vandalism-prone locations. To promote recycling, the City Council has adopted the Duobin design which handles non-recyclables and recyclables separately, and public bring sites are encouraged in areas where demand exists. This section highlights how important design consistency is.
- **Bollards:** While bollards play a role in Hostile Vehicle Mitigation (HVM), they pose challenges for visually impaired individuals. This was raised through the development of our Inclusive Design Guidance (appended to the draft SPD). The documents guidance that bollards should only be installed where there is demonstrable public interest. Removal of bollards might be desirable in some new public realm schemes.
- **Guardrails:** Guardrails clutter the streetscape and are generally discouraged. They may however be deployed at locations where pedestrians (especially children) might exit a property and go straight onto the carriageway. Removal of existing guardrails will be considered on a case-by-case basis. This again highlights the need for locally targeting Equalities Impact Assessments – to determine the local circumstances and expected users of public realm schemes.
- **Wi-Fi and Smart Technology:** Wi-Fi enhances accessibility, security, and wayfinding in the public realm. The City Council supports Wi-Fi provision through small cell units installed in lamp columns and other street furniture. The public realm should be future proofed to accommodate evolving connection and power supply needs.
- **Smart Sensors:** Smart sensors facilitate remote monitoring of conditions like air quality, traffic volume, and flood management. Their use is supported by the City Council if it complies with GDPR requirements. The majority of sensors in the Westminster are third party owned.
- **Bus Shelters:** Bus shelters are managed by TfL and are built to standard TfL design. Placement of bus shelters should consider passenger queuing patterns and assess their impact on nearby listed buildings. Guidance is provided on the access requirements for bus stops. Stakeholders have raised concerns about the potential for collision between cyclists and pedestrians accessing floating/island bus stops.

- **EV Charging:** The draft SPD includes a lengthy section relating to electric vehicle charging, including requirements for the placement of charging pillars. Details have been flagged for potential inclusion in the forthcoming 'Sustainable Transport Strategy', rather than the SPD in future drafts.
- **Telephone Kiosks:** The classic K2 and K6 phone boxes contribute positively to the city's streetscape, where they are well-maintained. However, modern phone kiosks that have been disconnected or with low usage should be removed. New phone kiosks incorporating other functions such as illuminated advert screens will generally be resisted.
- **Letter Boxes:** Letter boxes are widely cherished items of street furniture. They fall under the auspices of Royal Mail, and any proposals affecting them should involve consultation with both Royal Mail and the City Council.

4.6 Paving Materials

- The paving materials guidance promotes low carbon material choices and operating models (sourcing, delivery, installation, reuse etc.) plus a sustainable and simplified palette of materials. It also provides guidance on the use of tactile paving, with tails, in line with national guidance. This is a change from previous WCC guidance which did not advocate the use of tails/stems.
- Whilst this section in the SPD sets out the principles for the above, further materials specifications are set out in the Materials Guidance appendix to the SPD. The principles are as follows:
- **Long-lasting Impact:** High quality and durable materials should be used in the public realm for easy cleaning and maintenance. Their entire life-cycle from procurement to decommissioning should be considered upfront.
- **Choosing the Right Materials:** Attention should be given to the accessibility, design consistency and streetscape impact of paving material choices. Their impacts on carbon emissions, including those arising from sourcing and transporting, should also be examined.
- **Varieties Used in Westminster:** The traditional varieties of paving materials used in the city are Yorkstone, granite, basalts and concrete, which are strong, durable and hardwearing. Newer materials such as grey sandstones and mudstones have also been introduced. They should be applied based on locational characteristics such as footfall, loading and possibility of staining.
- **Materials Facilitating Sustainability:** The use of certain paving materials (and laying methods) conducive to sustainable drainage and heat island effect mitigation should be considered.

4.7 Street Trading / Commercial Activity (Including Tables and Chairs)

- **Balancing Liveliness and Impact:** Commercial activities and street trading could add to the public realm's liveliness but can also impede traffic movements and residential amenity. While commercial activities might be permitted on the highway, they should not result in its character and primary function of allowing movement being compromised. They should not harm their surroundings by causing problems like bad looks, noise, smells, blocking paths, creating waste, or hurting the local economy.
- **Placing Tables and Chairs:** Tables and chairs for commercial use requires a pavement license and would only be permitted in appropriate locations and times. They should not be stored on the highway outside of permitted hours. Whilst this section focusses on planning guidance, given the close relationship of both regimes, additional detail relating to tables and chairs is included, for ease of reference, which will be managed under the licensing regime.

- **Event spaces:** Should use materials that suit the event and avoid ones that absorb spills if food is involved. They should make sure there's easy access for emergency services and utilities, with plans for moving barriers if needed. Event organisers should talk to the Event team within the council about power needs and give the council a management plan for review.

4.8 Play and Recreation Space

- **Encouraging Playful Design:** The SPD advises that opportunities for play and leisure activities should be explored in public realm interventions to mitigate existing deficiencies. Dedicated space and facilities are desirable if there is a demonstrated need, but where this is not possible, the incorporation of playful design could be considered.
- **Temporary Play Opportunities:** 'Play street' orders and 'meanwhile' proposals could be useful tools to allow for the expansion of play and recreation opportunities, provided that these could be provided safely.

4.9 Freight, Servicing, and Deliveries

- **Moving Activities Off-Street:** Space for freight, servicing and deliveries (FSD) should be integrated within developments wherever possible to ensure that the public realm remains safe for people to move around.
- **Encouraging Sustainable Logistics Practices:** Consolidation, micro-distribution, and co-location of logistics facilities would be encouraged to reduce vehicle movements and promote more sustainable logistics practices. Existing underused on-street and off-street loading/parking spaces could be repurposed for last-mile processes.
- **Delivery and Servicing Plans (DSPs):** For schemes expected to generate significant FSD activities, or those referable to the Mayor of London, promoters/applicants might be required to submit DSPs that align with the guidance outlined in this document.

4.10 Waste, Cleansing and Maintenance

- **Providing Adequate Provision for Waste:** Westminster's Waste Strategy focuses on maximising waste reduction, reuse and recycling. Appropriate provision of waste receptors and related provisions should be integrated into public realm development schemes.
- **Facilitating Cleansing and Maintenance:** For each item placed within the public realm, ease of cleansing and maintenance should be considered. Specific guidance regarding the design and placement of litter bins and bring sites is included under the Street Furniture heading above.

4.11 Services and utilities

- **Coordinating Utilities Works:** The draft advises that statutory undertakers should coordinate utilities works to minimize disruption. Newly resurfaced roads should not be dug up within three years unless in an emergency. A permit scheme ensures the City Council is informed of these arrangements.
- **Providing Public Conveniences:** Public toilets should be provided at high footfall locations, as this could contribute to longer visitor dwell time. They should be gender and disability inclusive. There should be a high-level quality plan in place to curb anti-social behaviour, with on-street toilets orientated to ensure their entrances are not hidden

- **Managing Flood Risk:** Natural drainage in the public realm is encouraged and surfaces should be well-drained to minimise flood risk. Drainage and flood risk infrastructure should adapt to changing climatic conditions proactively. The Green Blue section above includes more specific guidance relating to SuDS.
- **Supporting Digital Infrastructure:** The City Council supports digital and telecommunications infrastructure investment but expects them to reduce clutter and play a part in enhancing the public realm's quality. Opportunities for co-location, shared facilities, and smart street furniture should be explored.

4.12 Power and Lighting

- **Maintaining Appropriate Lighting Levels:** Street lighting serves to enhance highway safety and creating a safe, secure, and appealing environment for public realm users. To achieve this, lighting levels should align with their intended purpose and setting, ensuring they match the activities taking place. This section provides high-level lighting guidance and sign-posts to the City Council's adopted Lighting Masterplan and Design Guide.
- **Lighting for Accessibility:** Prioritise light sources with colour rendering similar to daylight as they benefits visually impaired individuals. Adopt specific lighting treatments and level hierarchies as established by the City Council.
- **Lighting and Trees:** Proper distance between lighting fixtures and trees is essential. Following careful consideration, an agreed spacing of 5m (minimum) - 7m (preferred) between lights and trees has been included in the draft SPD. Lighting of trees poses threats on trees and the townscape, and is to be avoided except when used on exceptional specimens or purposeful placemaking schemes

4.13 Signs and Adverts

- **Basic Requirements:** All new signs and adverts should pose no adverse impacts to the core functions of the highway, and be sensitively located within streetscape and townscape contexts. They should also be as energy efficient as possible.
- **Resisting Adverts with Amenity Impacts:** Some forms of on-highway advertising cause harm to amenity and will generally be resisted. These include, but are not limited to, A-boards, vinyls on street surfaces, digital screens and displays, internally illuminated signs, adverts on street furniture, and signs fixed above the ground floor.
- **Controlling Estate Agents' Boards:** The City Council has obtained the power to exercise special controls on estate agents' boards. Estate agents are required to apply for consent before putting them up, and applications in restricted areas will normally be refused.

4.14 Public Art, Statues and Monuments

- **Incorporating Public Art:** Public art is both encouraged and sometimes required in development schemes. Artworks should be of high quality, easy to clean and maintain, and should not detract from their surroundings. They should be placed at accessible locations without disrupting movement with the artist's name and title of the work incorporated.
- **Accommodating Statues and Monuments:** Existing statues should generally be retained and where appropriate, their historic and social context explained. New statues and monuments are generally not permitted in the city's five Royal Parks and seven conservation areas, which have been

designated a Monument Saturation Zone. However, they would be encouraged in other areas where public art is under-represented. Designs should meet the highest standards and engage the local community in the process.

4.15 Security

- **Incorporating Security in Designs:** Security contributes to the wellbeing of public realm users and schemes should deliver places that people feel safe to use. It should be considered from the outset of the design process. Assessing how a place functions at different times of day and year helps identifying potential security risks.
- **Key Security Considerations:** Key security considerations in public realm schemes include resilience against emergencies such as terrorism, prevention of suicides, and Hostile Vehicle Mitigation (HVM).
- **Balancing Security and Accessibility:** Interventions that utilise landscaping and planting and maximise natural surveillance are desirable for public realm schemes, provided that a balance is struck between security and accessibility.

5 Glossary

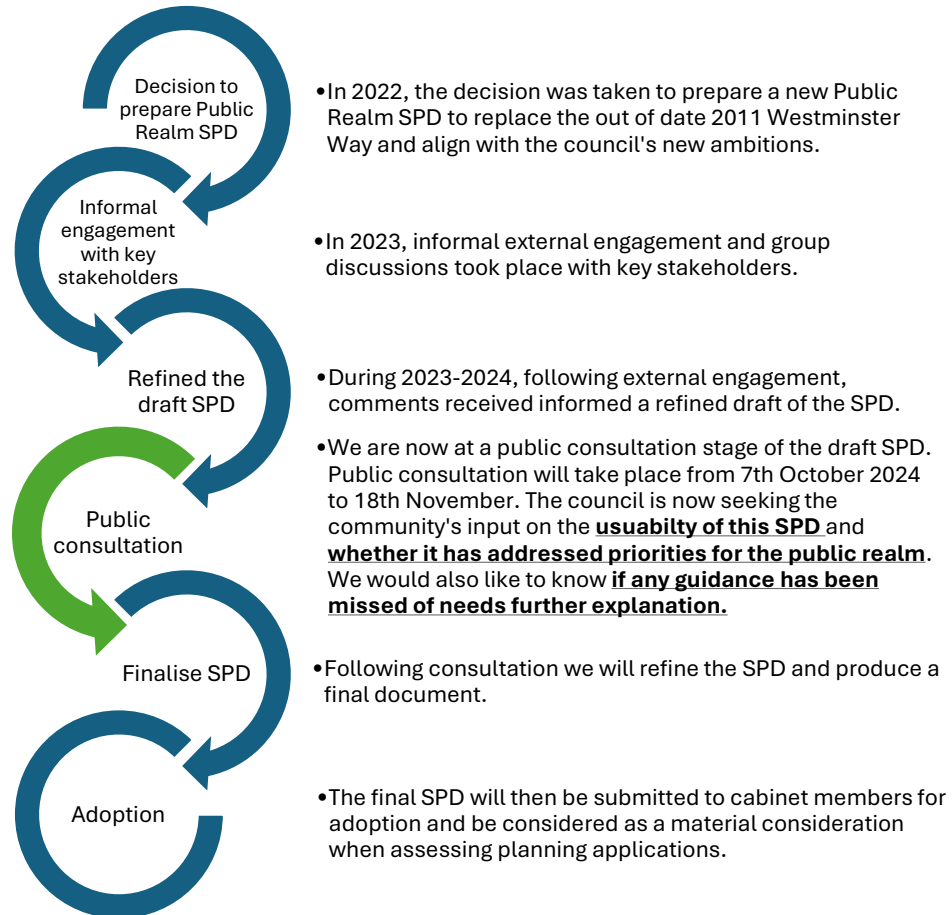
- The section provides clear definitions of key terms and used within the SPD. Its purpose is to ensure that everyone understands the language and terminology, especially for complex or industry-specific terms.

6 Information Sources

- This section provides a list of links and information sources used to inform the draft SPD and provide further reading.

Timeline and Next Steps

The information below sets out a timeline of the previous stages of engagement undertaken as part of this draft SPD, what we are seeking at this stage of consultation and the next steps in preparing to adopt this SPD.



Consultation

To take part in the consultation please visit our consultation page on [Commonplace page](#).

There you will find a set of survey questions asking for feedback on the 15 SPD chapters, the Materials Palette, the Inclusive Design Guidance and the Glossary.

You can also find out more about our hybrid event taking place in-person at Westminster City Hall and online via Teams, on Wednesday 13th November 2024.

Scan the QR code below to reach the consultation page:

