

● CONCILIO

Westminster City Council

Politics, Planning, and the Road to 2026

ISSUE #1



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Executive Summary

Westminster is one of the UK's most politically significant councils. For decades it stood as a Conservative fortress – shaped by its stark contrasts: world-famous commercial centres, affluent neighbourhoods, and vast housing estates.

This changed in May 2022, when Labour won control of the council for the first time since its creation, securing 31 seats to the Conservatives' 23. It was a historic break in Westminster politics, driven by demographic shifts, boundary changes, national dissatisfaction with the Conservatives, and the increase in local opposition caused by the Marble Arch Mound debacle.

Since then, Labour's position has weakened. By-election losses in the West End (2024) and Vincent Square (2025), plus defections, have cut Labour's majority from four to just two seats.

At the same time, third parties are gaining traction. Reform UK has advanced nationally but remains weaker in central London. The Greens and Liberal Democrats are peeling votes from Labour among younger demographics, while Independents also pose potential challenges.

In short: Westminster has moved from a safe Conservative council to a marginal borough, where a handful of votes in super marginal wards could decide control in 2026.



Yiannis Sophocleous

Head of Public Affairs

Yiannis Sophocleous

Next year's elections will be critical. A new administration will oversee full reviews of the City Plan and the Statement of Licensing Policy — two key frameworks that will shape development and investment decisions for years ahead. It will also define how the council interacts with the proposed Oxford Street MDC. In the run-up, the road to 2026 will influence planning applications over the next nine months and beyond.

This report is the first in a series of Concilio Insights on the Westminster City Council Local Elections 2026: setting out the current political landscape, the key issues ahead of the elections, the implications for investors and developers, and the battleground wards where control will be decided.

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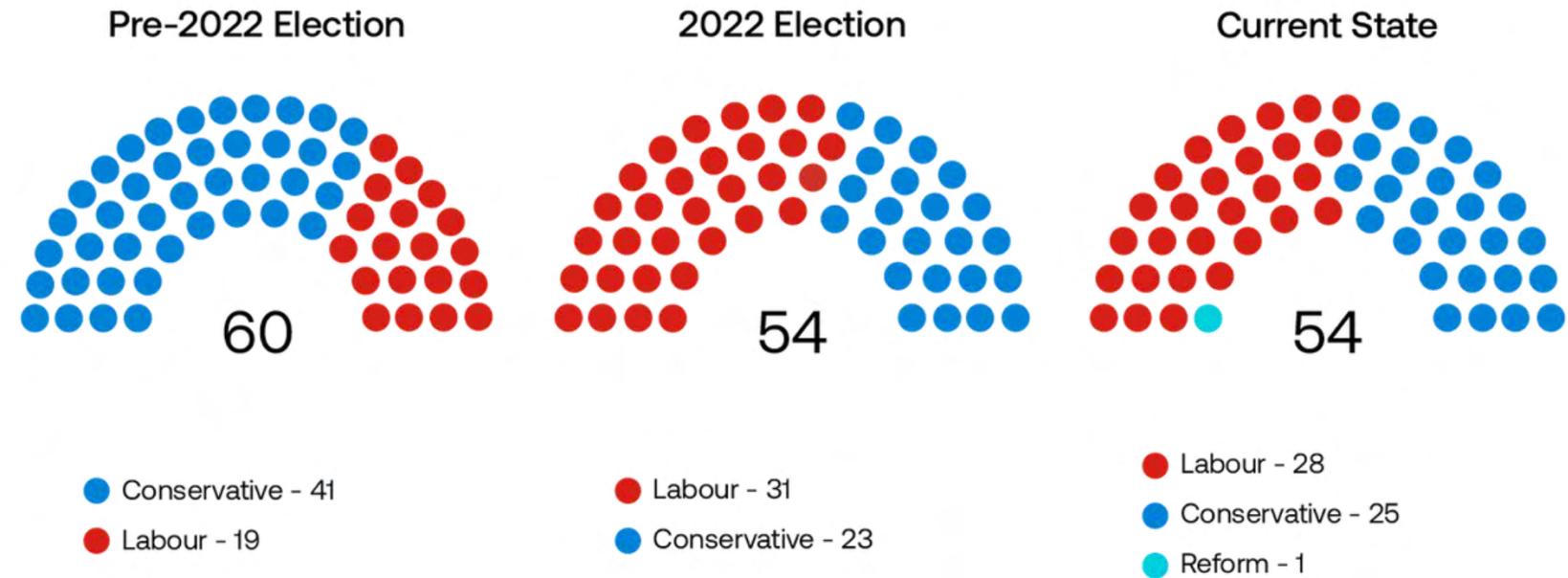
The State of Play

Current Landscape

The 2022 election gave Labour a 31–23 majority, heralded nationally as a symbolic breakthrough in the capital. However, subsequent by-elections and councillor defections have reshaped this picture.

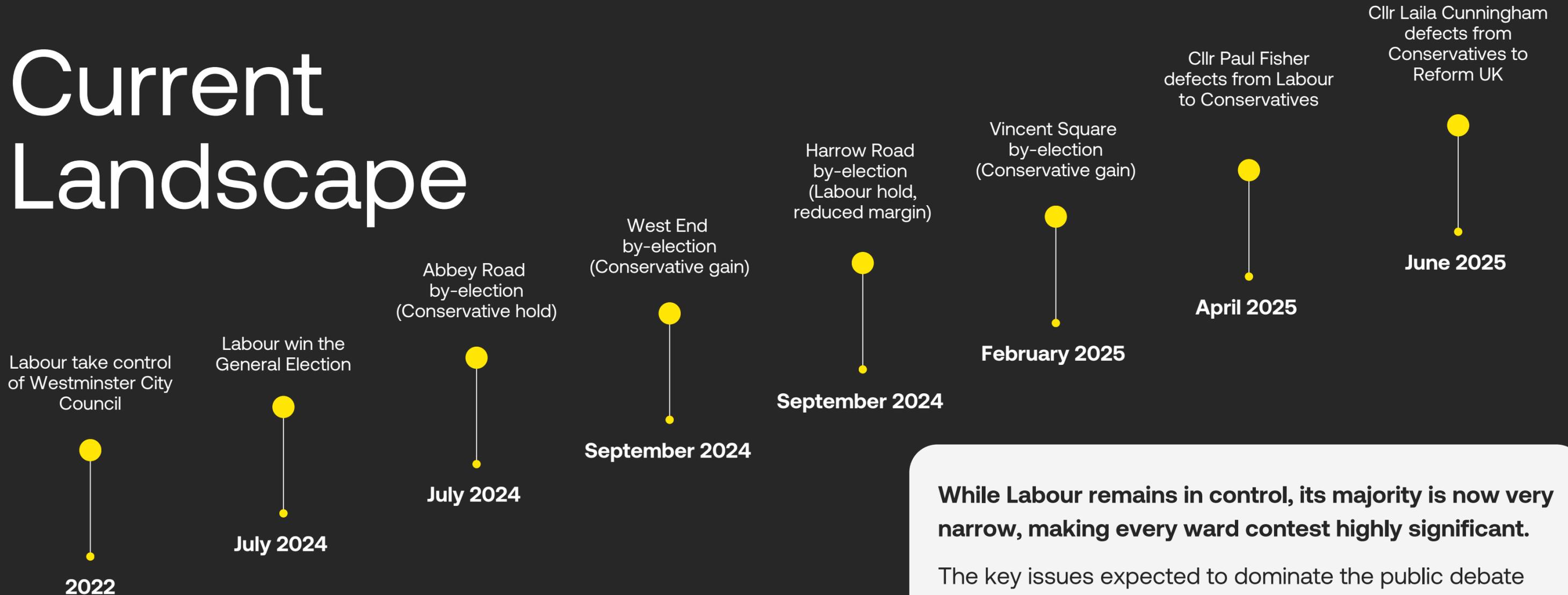
Following the Vincent Square by-election in February 2025, Labour's majority has been cut from four seats to just two — driven not only by defeats in West End and Vincent Square, but also by the April defection of Councillor Paul Fisher to the Conservatives.

Most recently, Cllr Laila Cunningham left the Conservatives to join Reform UK, becoming the first Reform councillor in Westminster. While Reform has made significant national gains, its traction in central London remains limited, finishing far behind both main parties in Vincent Square.



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Current Landscape



While Labour remains in control, its majority is now very narrow, making every ward contest highly significant.

The key issues expected to dominate the public debate in the run-up to the 2026 election are:

- The proposed Oxford Street Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC)
- Dissatisfaction with the national Labour Government
- Crime and anti-social behaviour
- Record of the current administration



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By-Elections Analysis

Since July 2024, four by-elections have offered insight into Westminster's shifting political landscape. Conservatives have gained ground — taking West End (Sept 2024) and Vincent Square (Feb 2025), while holding Abbey Road. Labour retained Harrow Road, but with reduced margins.

The Vincent Square result was particularly significant: Conservative Martin Hayes secured 45.4% of the vote to Labour's 32.5%, with Labour's share down nearly 11%, cutting their overall council majority to just four seats. Reform UK polled 9.6% — below their national surge — while the Liberal Democrats (7.2%) and Greens (4.7%) drew further votes from Labour. The result underscored Conservative resilience in core areas and the growing influence of third parties in shaping margins.

| Ward | Winner | Shift |
|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Abbey Road Ward (July 2024) | Cllr Hannah Galley (Conservative) | Conservative Hold |
| Harrow Road Ward (September 2024) | Cllr Regan Hook (Labour) | Labour Hold |
| West End Ward (September 2024) | Cllr Tim Barnes (Conservative) | Conservative Gain |
| Vincent Square Ward (February 2025) | Cllr Martin Hayes (Conservative) | Conservative Gain |

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Key Political Players

Labour Figures



Councillor Adam Hug

Leader of the Council

- Labour
- Since 2010
- Ward: Westbourne



Councillor Jason Williams

Chair of Planning (Major Applications) Committee

- Labour
- Since 2014
- Ward: Pimlico South



Councillor Geoff Barraclough

Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development

- Labour
- Since 2018
- Ward: Maida Vale

Conservatives Figures



Councillor Paul Swaddle OBE

Leader of the Opposition

- Conservative
- Since 2018
- Ward: Regent's Park



Councillor Robert Rigby

- Conservative
- Since 2010
- Ward: Regent's Park



Councillor Jim Glen

- Conservative
- Since 2018
- Ward: Pimlico North
- Conservatives Planning Lead

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Campaign: Early Messaging & Positioning



Messages and Localised Campaign

Labour will run a localised campaign, stressing delivery in Westminster, defending their record in office and distancing from the national party. Key messages likely to include:

- **Cost of Living support:** £26m invested as a support package.
- **Schools:** Free meals for all children aged 3–14.
- **Climate:** Westminster ranked top UK council for action.
- **Housing:** 1,350 new homes by 2030; housing services rated best in London.
- **Streets:** £35m for cleaner, safer public spaces and high streets improvements.
- **Safety:** 200 new CCTV cameras, community policing and more ASB inspectors.
- **Oxford Street MDC:** WCC Labour are presenting themselves as protecting local interests by taking what they describe as a “pragmatic approach,” emphasising constructive engagement with the Mayor’s office.



Promises and Positioning

The Conservatives will campaign on the back of their still-strong party machinery in Westminster, attacking Labour’s record in office, opposing the Mayor’s Oxford Street MDC plans, and capitalising on Labour’s falling national popularity. With a high chance of regaining control, Westminster is a must-win target for the party in 2026. Their key campaign messages include:

- **Crime & ASB:** Conservatives are highlighting concerns about drug dealing, anti-social behaviour, and resident safety.
- **Oxford Street MDC:** Conservatives strongly oppose the proposed MDC and Labour’s administration response to it. They highlight hundreds of residents backing their campaign, with Cllr Paul Swaddle OBE urging more to speak out. Their case is that the plans would displace traffic into Marylebone, Fitzrovia and Soho, harming air quality; reduce accessibility for the elderly and disabled; create challenges for residents and businesses; and strip away local accountability.
- **Cost of Living & Housing:** Conservatives are challenging Labour’s local record in office and linking cost of living concerns to the policies of the national Labour government.
- **Growth & Development:** The Conservatives are presenting themselves as more commercially attuned, promising a growth-oriented approach for Westminster. A future administration is likely to revisit Policy 43 (the retrofit-first policy).

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Shifting Politics, Shifting Power

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General Election 2024

The 2024 General Election confirmed Labour's national strength in Westminster parliamentary constituencies, with Labour winning the Cities of London and Westminster seat for the first time since its creation in 1950. However, polling district data revealed micro-level variation that offers clues for 2026. Affluent districts around Belgravia and Mayfair showed stronger Conservative support, while Labour performed best in areas with younger voters and more diverse communities, such as Paddington and Queen's Park.

Reform UK, while reshaping political maps nationally, polled weakly in Westminster. This underperformance underscores Reform's current difficulty in breaking through with metropolitan electorates, despite advances in other parts of the country.



Rachel Blake MP
Cities of London
& Westminster



Georgia Gould MP
Queens Park & Maida Vale



Joe Powell MP
Kensington & Bayswater

General Election 2024



| Name | Party | Votes | Change since 2019 |
|----------------------|-------------------|--------|-------------------|
| Rachel Blake | Labour | 15,302 | +10.2% |
| Tim Barnes | Conservative | 12,594 | -8.2% |
| Edward Lucas | Liberal Democrats | 4,335 | -17.2% |
| Georgia Gould | Labour | 20,126 | -9.4% |
| Vivien Lichtenstein | Green | 5,213 | +10.4% |
| Samia Hersi | Conservative | 5,088 | -6.5% |
| Joe Powell | Labour | 17,025 | +1.6% |
| Felicity Buchan | Conservative | 14,122 | -4.6% |
| William Hougbo | Liberal Democrats | 2,910 | -13.2% |

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Mayoral Elections

2021 vs 2024



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Labour managed to consolidate its position in West Central (combined area of the City of Westminster, Hammersmith and Fulham and Kensington and Chelsea), with Sadiq Khan proving resilient even in areas once considered Conservative strongholds.

The Conservatives, while still the main challengers, appeared to have lost ground, with turnout and voter loyalty weaker than in previous cycles.

The Green Party, which showed notable strength in 2021 on second-preference votes, saw a reduced presence in 2024 under the new system, highlighting the challenge for third parties when tactical second votes are removed.

The Liberal Democrats continued to register but remain a minor force, unable to convert visibility into breakthrough support.

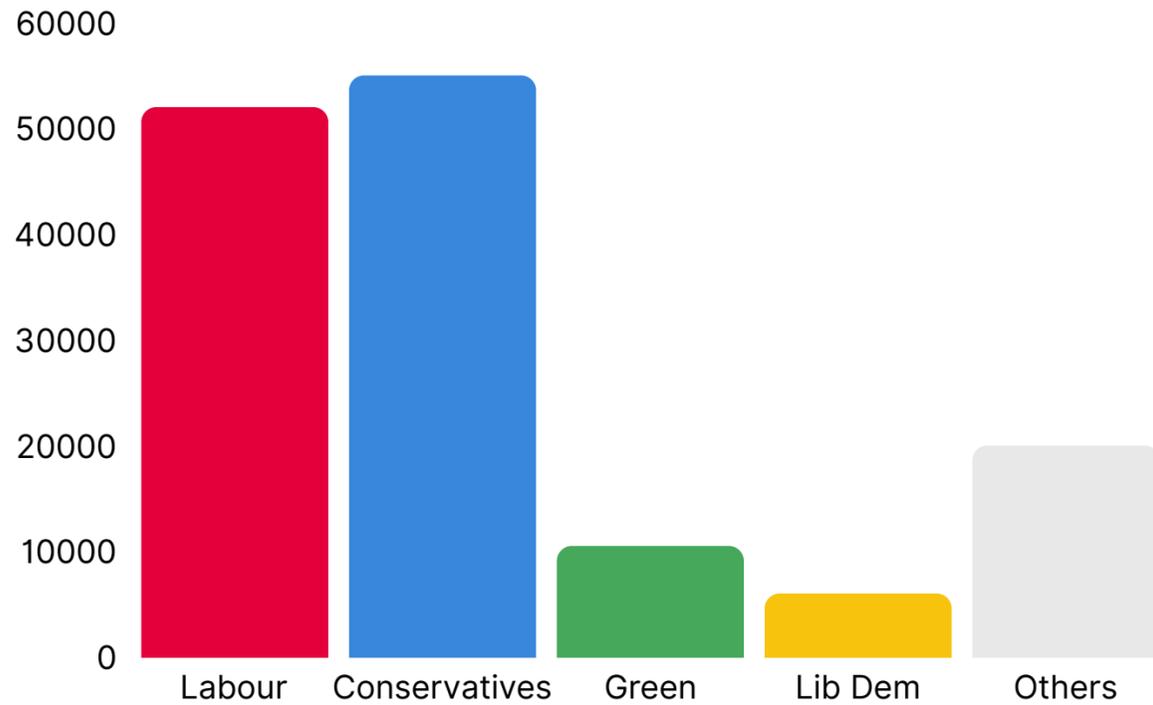
Meanwhile, 2024 saw Reform UK enter the race, gaining a small vote share in the West Central constituency, still far from challenging the two main parties in Central London.

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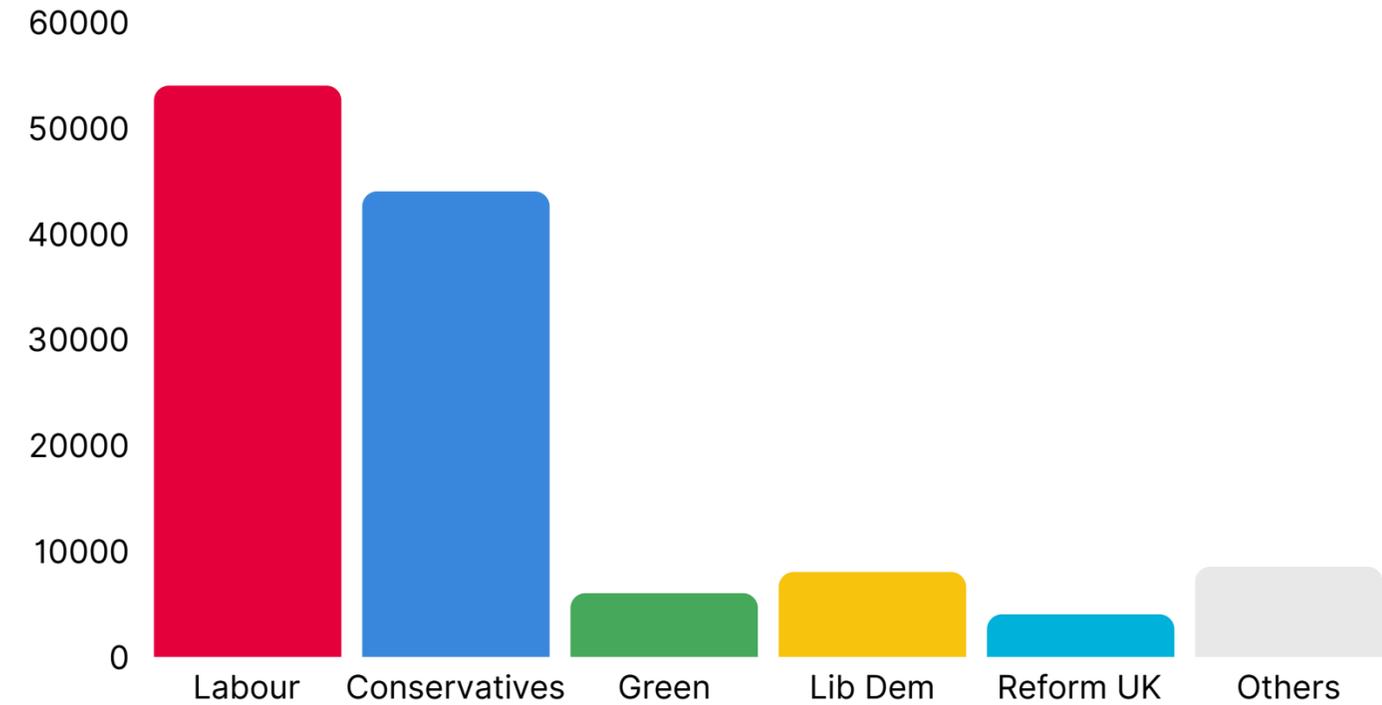


West Central - Mayoral Total Votes

West Central - 2021 Mayoral Election (First Prefs)



West Central - 2024 Mayoral Election



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Current Trends

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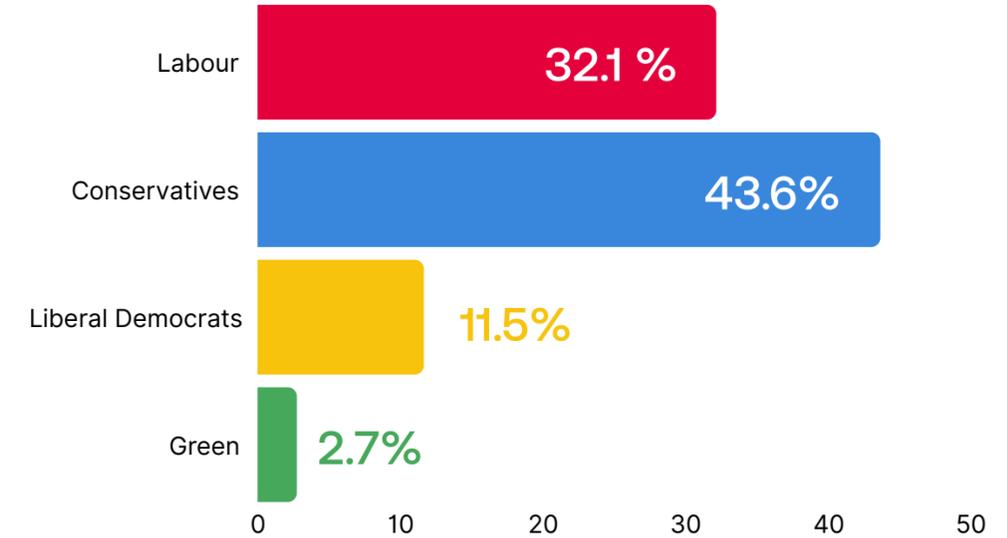
National Trends

Local politics in Westminster does not exist in isolation. Nationally, Labour's return to power in 2024 set the framework for regeneration and funding priorities, with emphasis outside London.

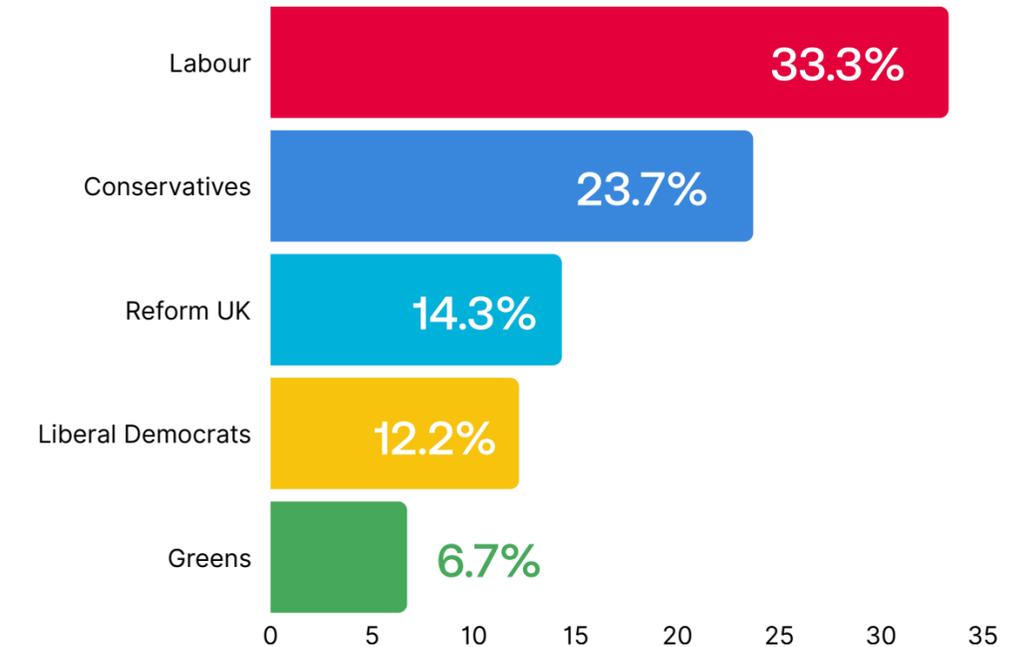
At the same time, Reform UK's rise has unsettled the political landscape: polling as high as 27% nationally, but underperforming in central London, where a more urban electorate has proved less receptive to its message.

Simultaneously, the Green Party's incremental growth has created new competition for Labour in certain wards, particularly those with younger, renter-heavy demographics. The Liberal Democrats remain marginal but can still influence outcomes in close contests. These national currents feed directly into Westminster's politics, as smaller parties act as decision makers in wards where a handful of votes can swing control.

2019 General Election



2024 General Election



National Trends

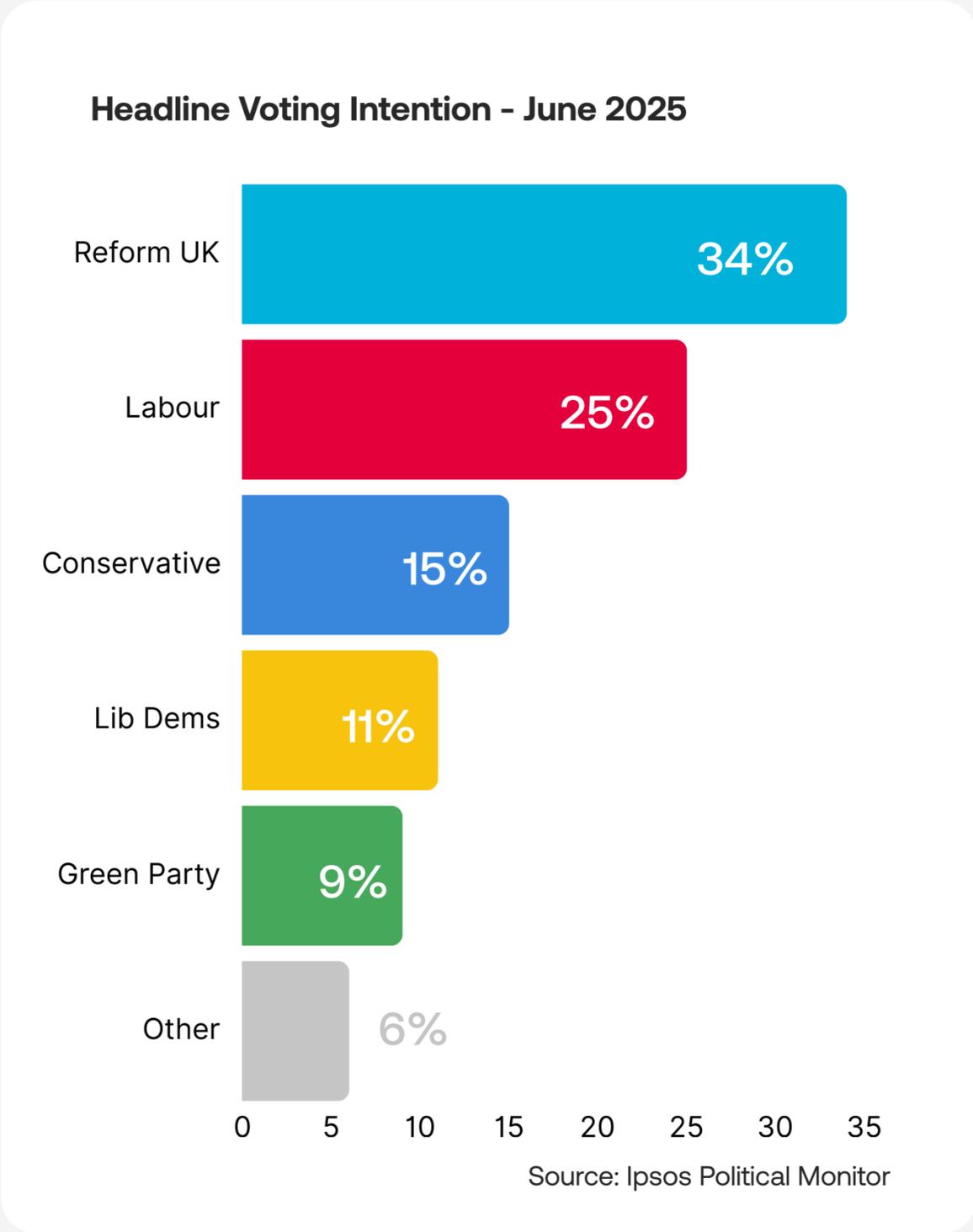
Ipsos's latest polling shows a marked shift in the political landscape.

Reform UK has reached 34%, giving it a nine-point lead over Labour and its strongest position to date.

Labour's support has fallen sharply, down from 37.5% in July 2024 to the mid-20s, the steepest drop for a governing party in decades.

At the same time, **public confidence in the economy has slumped: 75% of people expect things to get worse**, the most negative outlook recorded since Ipsos began tracking in 1978, and deeper than during previous recessions or the COVID-era cost-of-living crisis.

Taken together, the findings point to a challenging environment for the government and a political opening for Reform UK amid growing public dissatisfaction with both major parties.



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The Road to 2026

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Top Voter Issues

The Vincent Square and West End by-elections illustrated how mobilising residents around concerns about anti-social behaviour and dissatisfaction with the national government has helped the Conservatives build momentum, while Reform has remained weaker in central London. Labour, meanwhile, has emphasised its record in office, highlighting work on women's safety, community policing, and housing services, though these messages proved less effective in the recent by-elections.

National politics

Local results will be coloured by views on Keir Starmer's government, cost of living and wider economic sentiment, no matter how local the campaigns try to be. The debate on the ongoing conflict in Gaza has also created political challenges for Labour nationally, particularly in areas with younger and more diverse electorates.

Council performance

Labour's record in office will be a central focus of the election, with key issues likely to include housing delivery and housing services, while in more commercial parts of the borough, approaches to growth and business confidence are expected to be important factors.

Oxford Street debate

The Mayor's proposal for an Oxford Street MDC has become a defining West End battleground, with Conservative opposition intensifying as the plans progress — setting the stage for a heated public debate.

Safety, Streets and Local Issues

Crime and anti-social behaviour are cutting through with voters, alongside visible everyday issues like rental e-bike management and the street environment. These local concerns often carry more weight with voters than more complex policy debates.

Electoral dynamics

Low turnout, the mobilisation capacity of party machines, and potential vote-splitting by Reform UK, Greens, Lib Dems and Independents could all swing outcomes in tight wards.

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Oxford Street & Mayoral Development Corporation

Development corporation and Mayoral influence

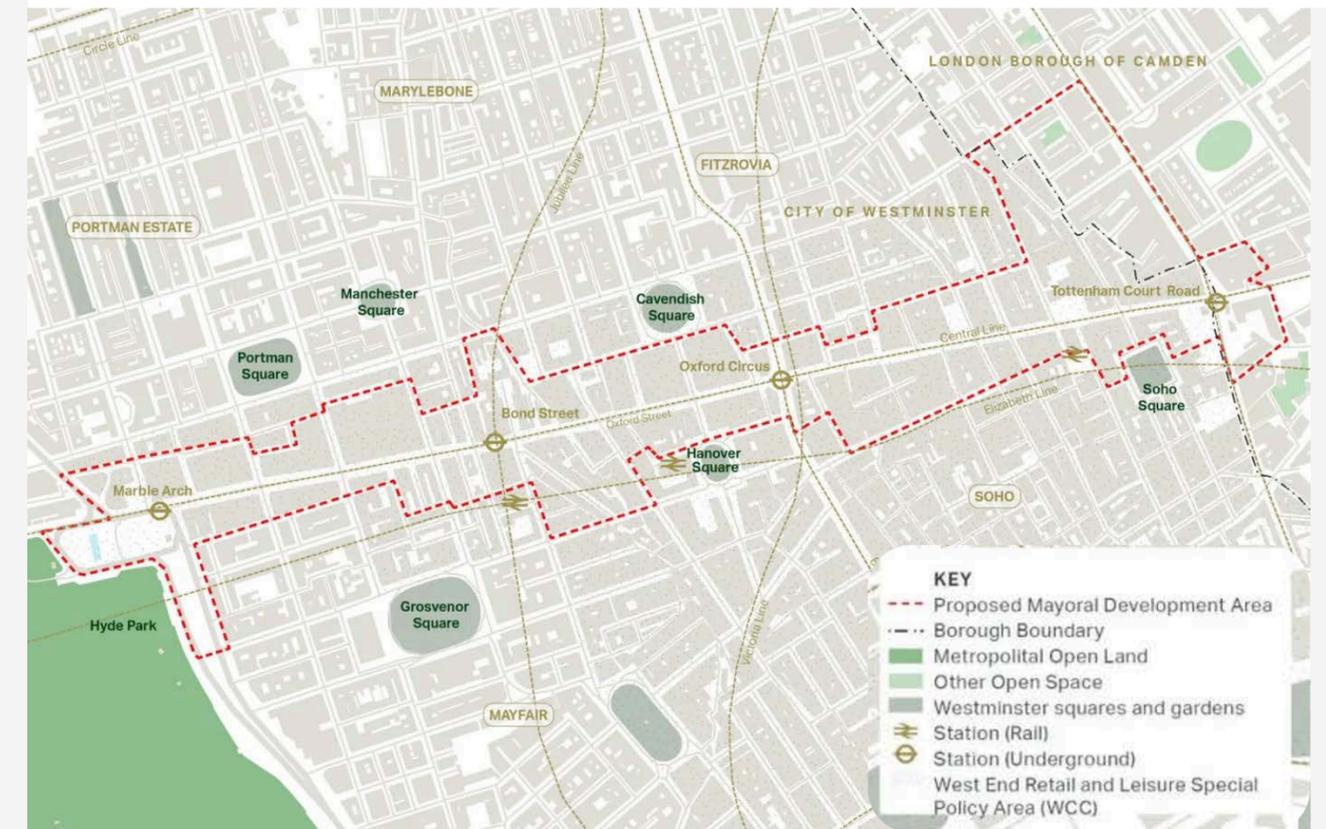
Mayor Sadiq Khan has set out plans to establish a Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC) to lead the pedestrianisation and transformation of Oxford Street, positioning it as a world-class, traffic-free retail and cultural destination. The move reflects City Hall's ambition to reverse the district's long-term decline, driven by structural shifts in consumer behaviour, the retreat of traditional department stores and the rise of online shopping. The MDC would be tasked with delivering a unified regeneration strategy, creating a safer, cleaner and more attractive public realm to stimulate footfall, investment and economic activity.

By transferring planning powers into mayoral hands, the MDC would enable a more direct and coordinated approach to development across the district. The Mayor has argued that only bold, city-wide intervention can

safeguard Oxford Street's global standing, with the MDC presented as the vehicle for delivering this vision.

In June 2025, he reaffirmed his determination to see the pedestrianisation completed "as soon as possible," citing what he described as overwhelming public and business backing. While Westminster Labour councillors remain opposed in principle, a future Conservative administration is expected to intensify resistance, pledging to seek Judicial Review should they win the Council, framing the issue as a wider battle over the balance of local authority and metropolitan control.

The clash reflects a broader tension at the heart of London governance: how far strategic interventions should override local autonomy in pursuit of economic renewal, especially in areas of high commercial and symbolic value.



Map of the proposed Oxford Street Mayoral Development Area. Source: Transport for London.

Oxford Street & Mayoral Development Corporation

Latest Updates

Progress is advancing, with City Hall recruiting a chief executive (with a proposed £200,000 salary criticised by the Conservatives) and a chair to lead the MDC. Around 50 staff are expected to be appointed, supported by a £150m budget allocated for the first phase of works.

The latest step came on 9 September 2025, when Westminster Council published a report confirming its intention to hand over “highway authority” powers following a formal request from the GLA.

The Labour administration has defended the move as a pragmatic step to secure influence in the future, pointing to concessions on bus access, security, freight consolidation, development funds. Conservatives have strongly opposed the decision and proposals, arguing it concedes too much power to City Hall and pledging to seek a Judicial Review if they win the local elections. They warn that pedestrianisation would displace traffic into

Marylebone, Fitzrovia, and Soho, worsening congestion, slowing journeys, and harming air quality; reduce accessibility for the elderly, disabled, and those with mobility issues; diminish residents’ quality of life; create logistical challenges for businesses; and proceed without sufficient detail on traffic management, funding, or accountability.

Residents’ groups have also voiced concerns over reduced accountability, traffic displacement into Marylebone and Soho, and unresolved questions around accessibility and community impact.

As part of building momentum for the Oxford Street MDC, the Mayor has also announced a one-day traffic-free event, “This is Oxford Street”, on Sunday 21 September. Billed as a showcase of what a pedestrianised Oxford Street could look like, the event is intended to build public support ahead of formal consultation later this year.



A Street for the Future. A Day to Remember.

This September, Oxford Street is being transformed. For one extraordinary day, London's most iconic high street will be traffic-free, filled with music, art, culture, food and community. Join us and experience the potential of the Mayor of London's bold proposals to transform Oxford Street into a pedestrianised and reinvigorated destination that all Londoners can feel proud of.

From Regent Street to Orchard Street, experience the potential future of London's most famous high street, reimagined for everyone.

This is community, creativity, culture. This is Oxford Street.



Reform, Green, Lib Dem & Independents Vote

Third parties are increasingly shaping outcomes in marginal wards. While Reform UK surged nationally in the 2025 local elections, topping the vote with 31% across 23 councils and winning control of 10 authorities, their impact in central London remains modest. Their 9.6% in Vincent Square illustrates limited penetration in metropolitan wards, though persistent support risks siphoning votes from both Conservatives and Labour in close contests. The Green Party's 4.7% debut in the same ward underlined their ability to chip away at Labour's urban margins, particularly among younger, environmentally-conscious voters.

The wider picture underscores Reform's ability to cluster support in "left-behind" Britain. **They won 677 council seats on 31% of the vote, with striking results in Brexit-leaning and working-class wards.**

Independents also add layers of unpredictability, with the ongoing debate around the conflict in Gaza likely to create particular challenges for Labour, potentially opening space for independent candidates to gain traction among voter groups where the issue resonates strongly. Should independents stand in 2026, their hyper-local networks could be decisive in finely balanced wards.

For developers and investors, this also matters: independents often campaign on planning and development issues, making them influential swing players in urban regeneration debates.

At root, these dynamics signal a political environment where strategic interventions must navigate not only the traditional party battle but also an increasingly fragmented, volatile local electorate.



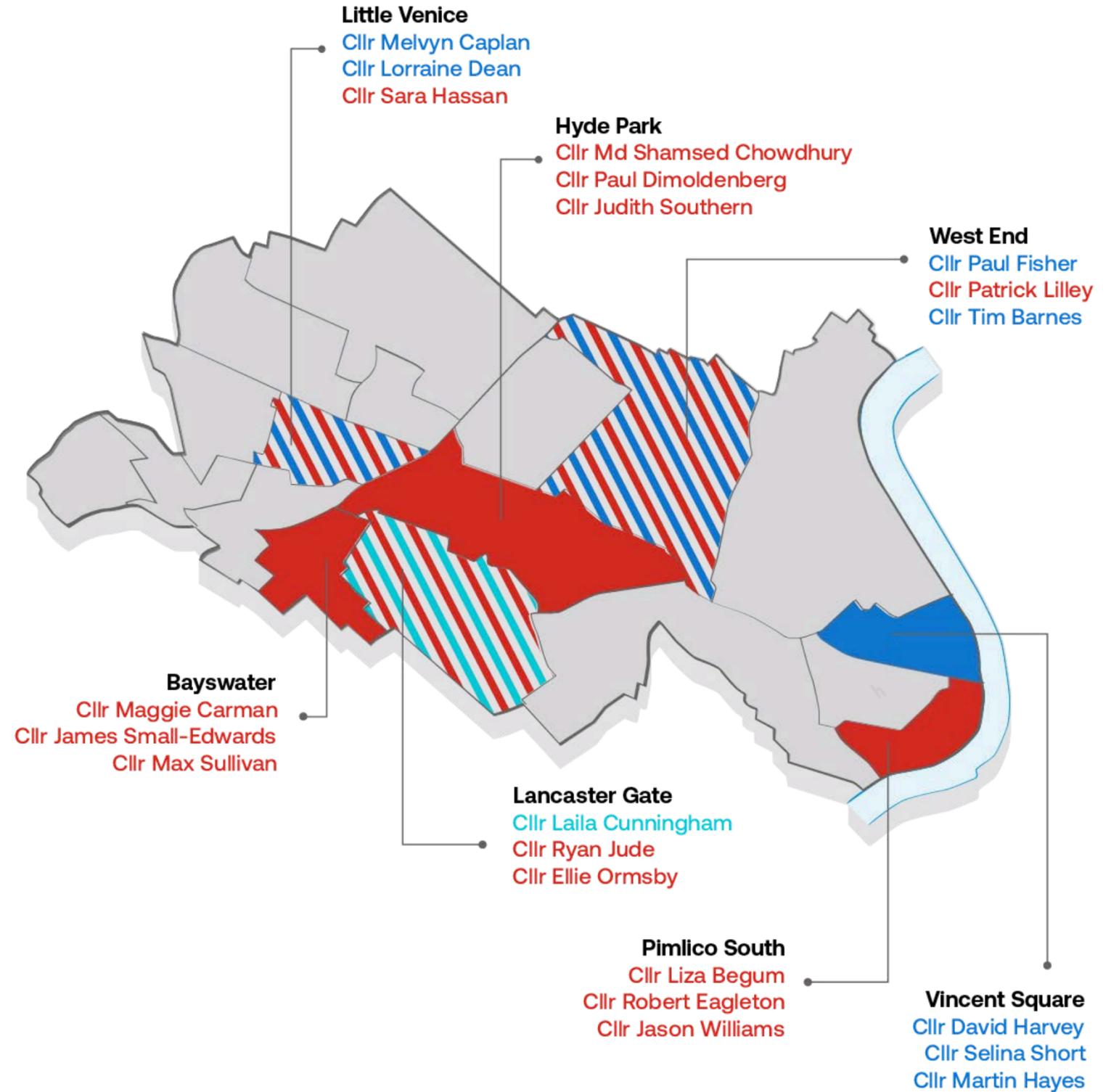
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Battleground Wards

Hyde Park looks vulnerable for Labour with veteran councillor Paul Dimoldenberg retiring from local politics. Lancaster Gate — decided by just two votes in 2022 — is wide open: Labour’s Ryan Jude is not re-standing and Cllr Cunningham has defected to Reform, leaving the ward up for grabs. Little Venice, with its mixed representation, could tip depending on other parties’ performance.

The West End — tied closely to the Oxford Street MDC — is both politically charged and ultra-marginal. Conservatives are buoyed by their 2024 by-election win, while Labour are fielding a popular local figure in Tim Lord, chair of the Soho Society.

Beyond these, Bayswater and Pimlico South remain wards where demographic complexity meets competitive margins. Vincent Square’s swing back to Conservative control was a symbolic gain, and it sharpens the challenge to Labour’s hold on the council. Together, these wards will decide the balance of power in Westminster in 2026.



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Looking ahead to 2026

Westminster is heading into one of the most closely contested elections in London. Labour's 2022 victory has been eroded by by-election defeats and defections, leaving only a narrow majority. The Conservatives are centring their campaign on national discontent with Labour, opposition to the Oxford Street MDC, a pro-business message, and concerns about crime and anti-social behaviour, while Labour is focusing on defending its local record in office.

National politics will also shape the contest: Labour's falling poll ratings and weakening economic credibility are creating headwinds, while Reform UK's strong national performance adds uncertainty, even if its impact in central London is limited. Third parties — Lib Dems, Greens, Independents — are also peeling away votes, raising the risk of fragmented outcomes.

Possible Outcomes as of today:

- **Conservative Victory** : National anti-Labour trends boost the Conservatives, who have already regained ground locally (e.g. Vincent Square).
- **Labour Retain Majority**: Achieved only with highly targeted local wins (e.g. West End, Lancaster Gate). Requires disciplined, localised ward-level campaigning.
- **No Overall Control**: Reform UK or Independents winning seats could force a minority administration or fragile coalition — though this is less likely.

October 2025- Election Scenarios

Scenario

1

Conservative Victory Driven by National Trends and Local Gains

- ↘ Conservatives regain Westminster Council control.
- ↘ Boosted by national anti-Labour sentiment and limited Reform gains in Central London.
- ↘ Gained Vincent Square in Feb 2025 by-election.
- ↘ Opposition fragmented (Lib Dems, Greens, Independents).

Scenario

2

Labour Secures a Majority Through Targeted Wins

- ↘ Labour scrapes a majority via targeted wins, with Reform splitting the Conservative vote.
- ↘ Win West End and Lancaster Gate and can afford to lose a seat elsewhere.
- ↘ Needs highly focused, local campaign, focusing on local record in office.

Scenario

3

No Overall Control, Leading to a Minority or Coalition Administration

- ↘ Reform UK wins a few seats, creating a hung council.
- ↘ Two possible outcomes:
 - ↘ Labour minority administration.
 - ↘ Tory-Reform coalition (unlikely).

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Implications for Investors and Developers

Our **future insights reports** will explore battleground wards, candidates, third parties, national trends, and key policy updates — and set out how we can support your investment and development decisions this year, while helping shape your advocacy agenda for the years ahead.



A Defining Local Election

The 2026 elections will be significant for Westminster. A new administration will oversee a full review of both the **City Plan** and the **Statement of Licensing Policy** setting the framework for development, regeneration, and licensing for years ahead.

Advocacy Opportunities

For investors and developers, this is the moment to develop and sharpen advocacy points. Early engagement — including cross-party engagement — will be essential to influence policy priorities, shape consultation responses, and ensure business voices are heard before and during the review process.

Oxford Street MDC

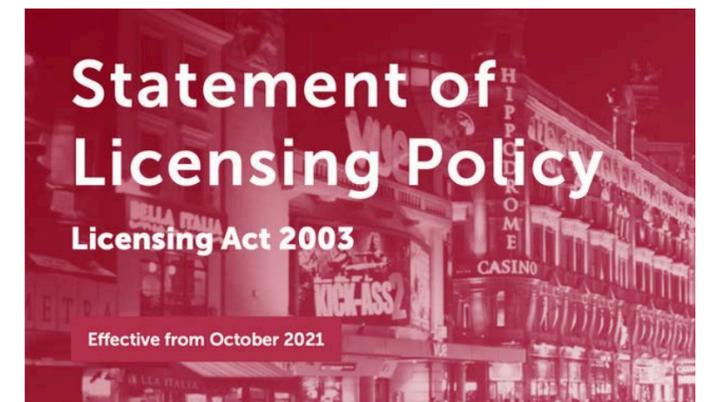
The creation of an Oxford Street Mayoral Development Corporation introduces a new governance player in Westminster. How it will interact with the council, local stakeholders, and — in the scenario of a future Conservative administration — remains to be defined, making it important for businesses to prepare for a shift in ways of working.

Policy Direction

The Conservatives are framing themselves as the more commercially attuned choice, signalling that a future administration could revisit Policy 43 (retrofit-first) and the proposed demolition tests that shape development decisions — presenting this as a reset between sustainability requirements and investment confidence. Labour, meanwhile, are defending their local record in office on housing, planning, growth and investment, council services, and sustainability, with their performance set to be tested at the ballot box in 2026.

Navigating the Year Ahead

In terms of development proposals coming forward in the next year, we always facilitate cross-party engagement in split or closely neighbouring wards. Our team has extensive experience in Westminster, strong cross-party relationships, and is ready to advise on both emerging schemes and the potential political changes ahead.



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PLAN
2019 – 2040**





Get in Touch

City of Westminster Local Elections Insights Team

Whether you'd like to talk through next May's local elections in Westminster City Council, and what this means for your planning application, explore new business in Westminster, or find out more about how we can help, our team would be delighted to hear from you. [Get in touch today.](#)



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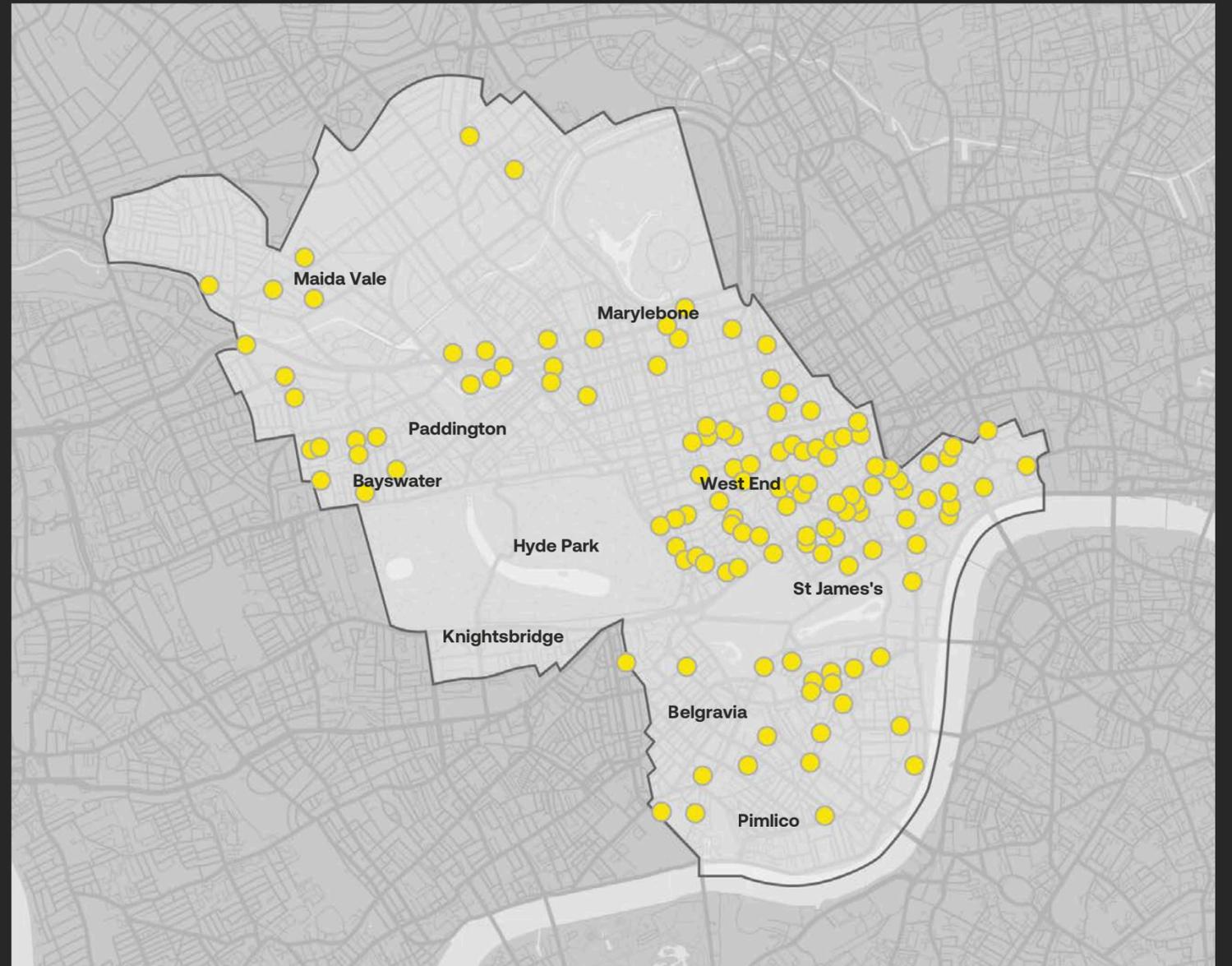
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Yellow dots indicate Concilio schemes in Westminster

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