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Tailoring Sustainability: Stitching Together the Fabric of Environmental Consciousness on Savile Row



- ▶ Westminster City Council's Savile Row refusal decision is set to tailor a new narrative in the UK development market.
- ▶ Developers are being encouraged to explore alternative approaches to construction and redevelopment that minimise environmental impact.
- ▶ The absence of clear national guidance on demolition versus refurbishment further complicates the decision-making process.



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Nested behind our Fiera London office lies the iconic Savile Row – the UK's home of bespoke tailoring. Previously, tradition here has intertwined with the fabric of old-school Mayfair, but Westminster City Council's decision to refuse the Pollen Estate's plans for 18-20 Savile Row, citing environmental concerns, is set to tailor a new narrative in the UK development market. This refusal underscores the ongoing debate surrounding retrofitting versus demolition in the UK real estate development community and carries significant implications for the industry at large.

The Pollen Estate's proposed development aimed to replace two aging office buildings with a new eight-story office scheme spanning 60,000 square feet. However, Westminster Council deemed the plans non-compliant with environmental policy, signalling a shift towards prioritising sustainability in development projects. This decision was closely watched as it marked the first of five schemes in Westminster to go before the committee. It's highlighted the increasing scrutiny placed on environmental considerations in planning decisions, thereby embroidering the real estate industry with significant implications.

Westminster's stance reflects a broader trend towards stricter environmental regulations and policies within the real estate sector. With considerations like 'embodied carbon' becoming increasingly prominent, developers are being encouraged to explore alternative approaches to construction and redevelopment that minimise environmental impact. The council's message is clear - knocking down and starting again should be a last resort once all other options are ruled out. By prioritising circular economy principles and sustainable design, Westminster Council aims to set a precedent for future development projects, emphasising the importance of meeting the highest sustainability criteria.

However, the decision also raises questions about the practicality of existing buildings and the economic viability of best-in-class sustainable development. While prioritising sustainability in the

planning process is commendable, some argue that strict adherence to environmental policies may hinder development opportunities and discourage investment in certain areas. The absence of clear national guidance on demolition versus refurbishment further complicates decision-making processes, leading to inconsistencies and uncertainties in the planning process.

The disagreement over how to treat environmental policy in planning was evident during the Westminster committee meeting, where three councillors voted for the scheme and three against it before the deciding vote was cast. This split decision underscores the challenges faced by stakeholders in balancing environmental considerations with economic realities and regulatory frameworks. With over two decades of experience, Fiera Real Estate is fortunate, as it has never been more important to have practical understanding of overcoming rapidly changing viability and legislative circumstances during the planning process.

Looking ahead, the Pollen Estate has the option to appeal the decision or resubmit revised plans that address the environmental concerns raised by Westminster Council. Regardless of the outcome, this decision serves as a catalyst for broader discussions within the UK real estate development community about the role of sustainability in shaping future projects. As stakeholders hem and haw over these complexities, finding a well-tailored compromise between environmental goals and economic imperatives will be essential for weaving sustainable development practices into the fabric of the UK's real estate development future.

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