

Transformation of Oxford Street

Heart of London response

June 2017

About us

Heart of London represents key parts of the West End including Piccadilly Circus, Leicester Square, Piccadilly and St James's. We operate an alliance of four Business Improvement Districts, representing over 500 businesses and property owners. These are iconic areas of London whose success is inextricably linked to nearby Oxford Street and the wider district.

Do you support the principle of transforming the Oxford Street District?

Heart of London supports the transformation of the Oxford Street District. The establishment of a long term vision for the Oxford Street District which can act as the bedrock for economic growth is essential to its long term success. Within this context, it is vital that any detailed proposals do not focus solely on addressing traffic issues (although these are important), but instead think of the future and how Oxford Street can become a vibrant multi-dimensional district, drive economic growth in central London and compete with other global retail centres.

Heart of London therefore recognises the trade-offs associated with the revitalisation of Oxford Street and its position within the wider district and West End. We therefore support the principle of at least partial closure of the east / west route along the western end of Oxford Street to all forms of traffic (between 10am and 10pm) provided that detailed proposals:

- Do not result in the displacement of traffic to neighbouring streets and areas. This is a concern regarding all streets in the West End, and most significantly for Piccadilly as an East-West corridor running parallel with Oxford Street
- Effect the reduction of traffic in order to revitalise the Oxford Street district
- Complement other measures targeting at improving air quality in central London, including the introduction of hybrid (or even electric) buses and taxis
- See the retention and enhancement of existing north / south routes to offer additional capacity as well as appropriate stands with fast-charging electric points for taxis
- See investment also targeted towards neighbouring streets to enhance permeability and pedestrian safety
- Are accompanied by a clear wayfinding strategy as part of an holistic solution to reconnect Oxford Street to the wider district

Comment on Issues and Challenges

By its very nature, international profile and proximity to the mixed communities of Mayfair, Fitzrovia, Soho and Marylebone there are a range of challenges associated with reimagining the Oxford Street district. We recognise that these challenges include:

- Projected growth in visitor numbers arising from population growth in London and the opening of the Elizabeth Line
- The ability to sensitively reconnect Oxford Street to its surrounding communities including the opening up and activation of appropriate side streets
- Heritage and conservation area designations
- Traffic congestion, vehicle idling and poor air quality
- The need to deliver more greening throughout the district
- The replacement of an ageing public realm which is no longer fit for purpose

- The need to refurbish or redevelop some of the existing buildings on Oxford Street which have reached the end of their commercial life to meet employment and growth targets
- Visitor safety around major transport interchanges and the need for improved pedestrian crossings
- The ability to deliver a meaningful reduction in traffic in central London and avoid any displacement of buses and taxis to surrounding streets

Improving the Look and Feel of Oxford Street

Whilst the West End continues to grow, we consider that it is hindered by the issues identified above. This in turn has a knock-on effect on the wider district. Our suggestions to improve the look and feel of the Oxford Street district are as follows:

- Prioritising the introduction of hybrid buses and taxis serving central London. Investment should also be targeted towards buses and taxis becoming wholly electric over time, supplemented by fast charging points particularly at new taxi stands on north / south routes
- Active enforcement against idling vehicles including taxis, buses and servicing vehicles
- Measures to limit the number of private hire vehicles entering central London, addressing what has been a doubling of these in the past 8 years
- Further promotion of freight and waste consolidation programmes across the West End, building upon the successful partnership of central London BIDs
- The introduction of more personal delivery consolidation and pick-up points across London
- That consideration is given to the introduction of green corridors, potentially linking to enhanced oases in Cavendish and Hanover Square
- New approaches to handling waste that seeks to avoid occupiers placing waste on the street, thereby improving pedestrian capacity
- 'Plug and play' opportunities to build into the new urban environment to provide the infrastructure for events which will enhance the vibrancy of the district
- Investment in a reimagined public realm as a catalyst for property owners to undertake a wide-ranging development programme, recognising the business-led character of the area with greater densification and height for commercial uses to meet employment and training targets
- The nurturing of an evening economy, complementing the existing retail and with good quality food and beverage offerings (both on Oxford Street and in neighbouring streets) to enhance the vibrancy of the district and guard against anti social behaviour as retail and commercial premises close for the day
- Robust new management approaches for the district, ensuring the highest standards of street cleansing & public realm maintenance; sustainable approaches to reducing rough sleeping & begging; and preventing an influx of disruptive street performance & pedicabs
- Finally, as a tactical point and way to test new concepts, consider flagship pilot projects and approaches such as Broadway in New York where pedestrian priority installations and events were trialled in advance of the long term public realm investment