

Westminster Amenity Societies Forum

13 November 2024

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
City Hall
Kamal Chunchie Way
London
E16 1ZE

by e-mail: mayor@london.gov.uk

Dear Mr Khan,

Oxford Street Pedestrianisation and proposed Mayoral Development Corporation

The Westminster Amenity Societies Forum (“WASF”) represents the 22 recognised amenity societies in Westminster.

We refer to your press release (the “Release”) dated 16 September 2024 proposing the creation of a Mayoral Development Corporation (“MDC”) for Oxford Street in order to facilitate its partial pedestrianisation.

1) Concerns about the lack of consultation and the immediate impact of the Release

Previous plans for the pedestrianisation of Oxford Street were rejected by Westminster City Council (“WCC”) after Transport for London (“TFL”) failed to resolve the concerns of local business and residential communities in 2018.

Instead, WCC has spent the last two years working up a new scheme for Oxford Street (the “WCC Scheme”) with TFL and the New West End Company (“NWEC”). That scheme built on the pavement widening carried out in response to the pandemic but retained access for buses and taxis. The WCC Scheme had progressed to the point where work had already begun, with council funds allocated and further business funding agreed in principle. There was extensive support for the project from local communities and businesses. The WCC Scheme, including greening, new pedestrian crossings and additional space for pedestrians, would have been implemented in 2025 and completed in 2026.

In response to the uncertainty created by the Release, NWEC withdrew its financial commitment to the WCC Scheme and it has now been abandoned. This has wasted several millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money and already constrained council resources and officer time. It has also delayed, possibly for years, any meaningful improvements to the public realm on Oxford Street. The fact that the Release was issued without consultation with WCC (or even TFL) has undermined confidence in your office. Unfortunately, it has also undermined confidence in the new Labour administration at national level just when confidence in good government needs to return.

While your announcement, as yet, lacks any detail, it is entirely possible that the removal of buses and taxis from part of Oxford Street will, once again, be unsupported by the local community and businesses, and prove impractical. Local people and smaller businesses who would be most impacted by the change, and those who have the most knowledge of the area, remain of the view that removing all traffic from this main east west arterial route is not practical. It is, as yet, unclear whether what you will propose this time round would make pedestrianisation work. However,

simply ignoring the people who live and work here will not address the well-rehearsed concerns that applied in 2018.

2) Concerns about the proposed MDC

Secondly, the creation of a MDC in the centre of Westminster is of concern. Such a step would be both unprecedented and unanticipated by the Localism Act. We are not aware that a MDC has ever been used in a central city area, and certainly not the most intensively developed and valuable centre of a global city. This is not what MDC's are for. In addition, other less time consuming, costly and bureaucratic methods could achieve the same result in terms of control of traffic on Oxford Street (should that prove to be appropriate).

While it is not yet clear what powers the MDC might seek, we wish to put on record that if the MDC seeks to take planning powers from WCC, it will face opposition from many Westminster residents due to the loss of accountability that would result. We care that planning policies, planning enforcement and planning decisions remain in the hands of locally elected councillors - who represent the people most directly impacted by those decisions. The loss of that mechanism to an MDC controlled solely by you and a board representing property interests with no community representation - would be resisted. If your plans rely solely on support from property investors, visitors and tourists, this will be a significant problem going forwards.

In addition, the complex process to establish the MDC will further delay the investment that Oxford Street needs now - and which would have been delivered by WCC in 2025/2026, had you not intervened.

We would therefore ask that you re-consider your approach to this, waste no more time on the MDC and instead work with WCC and local communities on plans which can deliver for Oxford Street more quickly and with a degree of consensus.

You have said that you will be meeting with local residents as your plans develop. We look forward to meeting with you to discuss the issues involved at the earliest possible opportunity.

Yours sincerely



Tim Lord, Chair of WASF

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signed on behalf of the Westminster Amenity Societies listed below:-

The Residents Society of Mayfair and St James

The Queen Anne's Gate Residents' Association

The Soho Society

The Marylebone Association

North Paddington Society

Covent Garden Community Association

Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association

The Thorney Island Society
Paddington Residents Active Concern on Transport
Belgravia Neighbourhood Forum
Belgravia Residents Association
Belgravia Society
Harrowby and District Residents' Association
The St. John's Wood Society
Seven Dials Trust
Knightsbridge Association
Cathedral Area Residents Group
Paddington Waterways and Maida Vale Society
Portland Village Association
The Hyde Park Estate Association
South East Bayswater Residents Association
Bayswater Residents Association

copy: Leader of Westminster City Council

Member of the London Assembly for West Central - James Small-Edwards

Rachel Blake MP