

## **Oxford Street District Place Strategy and Delivery Plan Consultation Response**

### **Summary**

Baker Street Quarter Partnership welcomes the long-term ambition and commitment of Westminster City Council (WCC) to the district. Our members are particularly encouraged by the holistic, end-to end and district style approach taken by WCC especially the inclusion of the full length of Oxford Street, areas to the north into Marylebone and the focus on Marble Arch as a key gateway and opportunity. We are supportive of the principles set out in the strategy – in particular:

- The focus on gateways and thresholds to neighbouring districts;
- The prioritisation of pedestrians and especially walking routes from Oxford Street and the Elizabeth Line north
- The enhancement of management and enforcement of the district;
- Air quality improvement;
- A reduction in freight movements in the district;
- The Cultural Strategy and proposals to better link existing national institutions with the wider district

Our support is tempered by concern to ensure that the strategy is sufficiently resourced and planned to ensure it truly benefits the whole district. We welcome the opportunity to raise these at this point before more detailed plans are developed.:

- The streets adjoining Oxford Street – Portman, Orchard and Duke Streets - are key gateways to Oxford Street and Marylebone. We therefore could not support any future detailed proposals to load these key streets with bus, coach and taxi infrastructure detrimental to the success of these streets in themselves and in their function as key gateways.
- We are in particular concerned to ensure the western end of Oxford Street (which cannot benefit from the fuller traffic reduction) is sufficiently improved to assure its future buoyancy and competitiveness relative to the rest of Oxford Street in particular.
- We seek confirmation that the strategy is sufficiently resourced to protect the wider district from displacement through a management plan, enforcement, freight reduction and traffic engineering that apply consistently across the wider district. We are committed to playing our part in ensuring the success of these plans.

The strategy recognises the significance of the commercial/corporate sector to the local economy and employment which is welcome. The areas surrounding Oxford Street and in particular around Baker Street have a very strong corporate economy employing tens of thousands. It is important that the proposals for Oxford Street are sufficiently resourced and planned to ensure they strengthen and do not harm these important commercial areas.

## About Us

Baker Street Quarter Partnership (BakerStreetQ) was established as a Business Improvement District to bring a new-found purpose and focus to the Baker Street and Marylebone area. We represent 180 businesses and property owners - the majority of our occupier members are from the corporate office sector with hospitality also featuring in our membership. BakerStreetQ is driving forward positive change to benefit everyone in the area ensuring it is a place for people and a place for business to ensure it is the West End's Commercial District of choice.

To this end the Partnership works towards six key priorities to enhance the area:

- Quality Spaces & Streets
- Better Air Quality
- Safe & Cared For
- Vibrant & Entertaining
- Local Networks & Community
- Collective Voice & Area Identity

The proposals for Oxford Street are relevant to all these priorities and given our location directly adjacent to western Oxford Street they are of keen interest to us and our members.

## Principles for The Oxford Street District

We strongly support all 12 principles for the Oxford Street District. We have specific comments on some of these which are set out below.

1. Make the district inclusive, accessible and liveable – for example, have easy access for all to a beautiful, safe, clean, well-managed and improved district
2. Support economic growth across the district and promote innovation and experimentation
3. Design for flexibility – for example, design each space for elegance and comfort in both extremely busy periods and quiet times
4. Build from existing and connect the whole district – for example, enhance the area's remarkable assets and improve connections in the district
5. Prioritise pedestrians and value every space
6. Make the district better for cycling
7. Create beautifully designed streets, gateways and a diversity of public spaces across the district
8. Enrich the cultural life and identity of the district
9. Take every opportunity to add additional trees and planting, creating new green spaces and revitalising the garden squares
10. Take immediate steps to address management – for example to ensure the district is safe and well maintained
11. Improve safety
12. Improve air quality and manage freight and servicing movements

### Our comments on the main principles:

#### **A truly district wide approach (Management, Air Quality, Pedestrian Priority)**

It is vital to the wider area that a genuinely district wide approach is applied to all elements of the strategy, in particular traffic engineering and planning, management and enforcement and freight reduction. This is essential to counter possible displacement into surrounding streets and areas of traffic, traffic infrastructure (bus, taxi, parking) and anti-social behaviour. We

seek strong reassurance that resources will be made available beyond Oxford Street into the wider district to achieve this.

We would want to understand the impact of the proposals for Oxford Street on traffic in the wider district to ensure no significant impact to traffic volumes and flows including considering different days of the week and times of day.

### **Management and Enforcement**

In addition to the strong need for reassurance regarding a district wide approach we seek reassurance regarding the control of utility works. As an exemplar project we would like to see the Oxford Street project setting a new standard and solution to the perennial problem of utility works that are not coordinated with public realm improvements and often damage newly laid public realm schemes without proper rectification.

### **Air Quality and Freight**

- We are concerned that there is not currently a sustainable, larger scale solution to reducing freight in the West End. Without such a solution we feel strongly that the success of the Oxford Street project will be compromised and there is a risk of greater impact to surrounding areas than is necessary.
- We seek reassurance that the project has solid plans and significant resources to make a real reduction to freight in the area
- It is important that any such solution:
  - Recognises the significance of the office sector to freight movements in the area and across Oxford Street.
  - Secures initial investment for an effective, ultimately sustainable solution.
  - We would like to see TfL move from piloting smaller scale freight initiatives to leading a regional freight reduction approach to ensure more significant reductions and a sustainable programme we can support and promote to West End businesses.

### **Culture**

- We strongly support the Cultural Strategy and focus on showcasing, enhancing and better linking existing world-class destinations, such as the Wallace Collection, as a key element of the West End and Oxford Street offer.
- We strongly support the proposal for redesigning the setting of and strengthening wayfinding to the Wallace Collection.
- We suggest Madame Tussauds is considered in the analysis of nearby attractions as another strong element in the area's cultural offer given its world-renowned status, significant visitor numbers and location on the park to park walking route.

### **Greening and Park to Park Walking Route**

We strongly support the proposed park to park walking route via Portman Square and Baker Street and the focus on green spaces and greening. We would be keen to work with the Council on this given it goes through our BID area and to explore how the themes of play, greening and wayfinding can be creatively combined to create something really special.

### **Cycling:**

We would welcome early sight of the proposed cycling solution north of Oxford Street.

### **Principles for Oxford Street**

We are supportive of three principles for Oxford Street with the exception of the final one as set out below.

13. Diversify land use and extend the life of Oxford Street – for example, offer a wider range of attractions beyond traditional shopping

14. Make Oxford Street spectacular

15. Embrace Oxford Street's role as an important transport corridor for the West End

### **Specific comments on the three principles**

Regarding the third specific principle for Oxford Street: we question its designation as 'an important transport corridor' and feel the terms used here should reflect a more balanced approach between pedestrians (as the priority) and other forms of transport.

### **Elements of the Draft Place Strategy**

- Mix of land uses
- Streets and spaces
- Proposed operational approach
- Transport:
  - Walking
  - Buses
  - Cycling
  - Vehicle access
  - London taxis
  - General traffic
  - Goods vehicles, servicing and deliveries
  - Road safety
  - Coaches
  - Air quality
  - Management
  - Accessibility for all
- Wayfinding and legibility
- Amenity
- Architectural quality
- Materials
- Lighting
- Landscape
- Culture and public art

The elements of the Draft Place Strategy appear fit for purpose. We have limited additional comments on the Elements as these are largely covered in our comments on the Principles above and on the Zones below.

### **Works planning**

We seek reassurance that the actual works to implement these proposals will be heavily planned to ensure Oxford Street and the wider district remain buoyant including:

- Understanding and layering on top of the development pipeline in the area
- Focusing on quieter times of the year
- Understanding the impact of each section of works – e.g.: Does starting with Marble Arch lead to a reduction in traffic on the rest of Oxford Street which may reduce concerns of wider traffic impact of improvement to the Selfridges section.

### **Street Trading kiosks**

To ensure the success of the streets off Oxford Street and ambitions for strong gateways as well as oasis spaces we urge a review of street trading locations recognising that currently street trading stall locations are detrimental to the success of key gateways/oasis spaces.

## **Lighting**

We would like to understand the classification of areas in the 'Lighting' section – specifically large areas north and south of Oxford Street as 'residential' when they are in fact a mixture of commercial and residential.

## **Buses and Coaches**

Once it comes to detailed design for these proposals, we would not be supportive of an increase in buses north of Oxford Street especially around Orchard Street, Portman Street and Portman Square.

We would like to see the issue of coach stand provision, management and enforcement picked up strongly as part of these proposals.

## **Zones A, B, C**

Our interest is in Zones A, B and C of the proposals on which we have the following comments:

### **Western Oxford Street**

The west end of Oxford Street from Selfridges to Marble Arch is a vital gateway to the rest of Oxford Street as well as to Marylebone and Mayfair. This stretch is already challenged by and will not benefit from the traffic reduction proposed on the rest of Oxford Street. It is therefore imperative that the proposals recognise that this stretch will have to work harder to achieve the same levels of comfort and interest for pedestrians and visitors and in turn to maintain its buoyancy and competitiveness to the rest of the street. It is essential that the proposals recognise the significance of this stretch as a key entry gateway to the street and the district as well as the challenges that need to be resolved.

### **Gateway streets**

Ensuring the streets off Oxford Street – Orchard, Duke, Portman - the vital gateways to the neighbouring Marylebone District - are improved and not compromised by bus/taxi/servicing infrastructure. In particular with the plans for a special area outside Selfridges (which we are supportive of).

### **Marble Arch**

We strongly support the prominence of Marble Arch in the proposals but would like these to be still more ambitious. Marble Arch is a key entry point to Oxford Street and Marylebone that currently detracts significantly from the attractiveness of both. There is huge opportunity to transform this neglected and challenged space to a place that is welcoming and a positive attribute to the area as identified in The Portman Estate commissioned study of the area.

## **Projects**

- We strongly support the creation of a focus area outside Selfridges
- Would like more detail on how the new wider pavements would be animated and to ensure key stakeholders have an influence in this
- We strongly support the Portman Square improvements
- We strongly support the proposed Orchard and Portman Street improvements – especially the review of parking and kerbside activity and prioritisation of pedestrians
  
- We strongly support the inclusion and prominence of Duke Street and the link up to Manchester Square with its vital links for future Crossrail passengers
- We strongly support the proposal for a balanced plan for Duke Street/Picton Place/Barratt Street to improve pedestrian experience and recognise the need for vehicular customer drop offs – although we note that Picton Place must be included in these plans.