

## **OXFORD STREET TRANSFORMATION**

### *Consultation Response From Baker Street Quarter Partnership*

Baker Street Quarter Partnership is the Business Improvement District for the wider Baker Street and Marylebone area representing 170 significant local commercial occupiers and landowners. We are focused on ensuring the long-term vitality and progression of this unique and important commercial district of Westminster, while ensuring wider benefit to the residential communities within and around it. Ensuring the area is enjoyable, safe, clean, vibrant and accessible are key focuses.

The commercial district around Baker Street and west Marylebone is a leading centre in the West End and CAZ with 50,000 employees working in the District bringing an estimated annual spend of £30.5 million (on top of an estimated £4.5 million from visitors). The highest quality office occupiers are attracted by the excellent transport infrastructure, the high-quality workspace and the mixed-use ecosystem of retail, restaurants, hotels and culture, together with the high-quality environment and place. Investment in the area remains strong with a robust development pipeline for high quality office accommodation.

Oxford Street is an important neighbour to Baker Street and Marylebone, with many commuters and visitors entering and leaving the district via Oxford Street and its Underground stations. Currently their experience entering the district from Oxford Street tends not to be positive and detracts from their enjoyment of our District. It is an area commuters will actively avoid if they can due to overcrowding and concerns around anti-social behaviour and safety. Local office workers choose to use Selfridges back entrance and the Bond Street Station entrance/exit on Marylebone Lane for these reasons.

We are therefore strongly supportive of improvement to Oxford Street that would make it a better neighbour to Marylebone. Our response sets out this general support while also raising areas of concern we would like to see focused on and addressed.

***Q1. The Mayor has proposed the designation of a Mayoral Development Area (MDA) and the establishment of a Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC) to help regenerate Oxford Street in line with his vision for the street. We would like to know your views on this.***

### ***The designation of an MDA and the establishment of an MDC for Oxford Street***

We have long desired improvement for Oxford Street and, as such, have been generally supportive of programmes setting out to accomplish this. The proposed MDC for Oxford Street has the potential to achieve improvement for Oxford Street and we are therefore likewise generally supportive.

### ***The boundary of the MDA***

We partially agree with the boundary of the MDA:

### **Marble Arch:**

We are particularly pleased that the MDA includes the Marble Arch island as a key strategic site with huge potential to enhance this key gateway. We are strongly supportive of the Portman Estate's proposals to improve this rather neglected area and redesign it to properly connect with both Oxford Street and Hyde Park as well as enhancing the setting of the Arch and providing much needed public space.

### **Side Streets Oxford Street - Marylebone:**

We are concerned that the boundary cuts across key side streets that link Oxford Street and the south of Marylebone and would like to see the boundary move north a block to Seymour Street/Wigmore Street to encompass the full length of these streets. This would ensure a unified approach to their future design and operation.

These streets – namely Old Quebec Street, Portman Street, Orchard Street, Duke Street, James Street and St Christophers Place – form key gateways and links between Oxford Street and Marylebone, and will be vital considerations in encouraging footfall flow between the districts and securing complementary amenity uses. The 50,000 footfall and £30.5 m annual spend from workers in the Baker Street/Marylebone commercial district is significant in this respect.

The current proposed MDA boundary would mean any future public realm schemes, street management and activation for these important streets would become more complex as they would have to work with two local authorities involving the complexities of two planning and regulatory functions.

Our concern is that this will stymie holistic, public realm plans and improvements and new uses on these streets as well as impacting their vibrancy and upkeep. To ensure the success of Oxford Streets these complementary streets need to succeed and as drawn the MDA boundary would not support this.

Otherwise, we are happy with the proposed boundary.

### ***The purpose and objectives of the MDC***

We are supportive of the stated purpose of the MDC in driving the improvement of Oxford Street.

We are supportive of the stated objectives of the MDC, in particular the vision for an area that is inclusive, attractive, high-quality, sustainable as well as a high performance visitor destination.

The objective of ensuring the area is well managed is of particular importance to us as the neighbouring district and we would like reassurance that there will be clarity of responsibility for management and that sufficient budget will be made available to provide the management required – in particular around security, maintenance and cleansing, with suitable allowance for growth in line with the desired increase in visitors to the area.

With recent changes of use on Oxford Street providing more significant office uses, the importance of the area as an office district should be recognised in addition to its status as a retail and leisure destination.

***The approach to the MDC's functions in relation to planning, other functions and granting discretionary relief from non-domestic rates***

We support the MDC assuming planning powers within the MDA to establish a cohesive vision for Oxford Street and a unified approach.

Clarity around how this impacts those already in the planning cycle in the neighbourhood during the transition will be important.

Most important in relation to the planning function is that it works efficiently across major applications down to public realm interventions such as public seating, greening and lighting with clear guidance for applicants.

We are concerned that some of the benefit this represents could be stymied given licensing will still sit with the local Council. This would likely lead to increased costs and complexity for applicants and the risk of differing conditions from each authority.

We would like to see clear information on how developer contributions will be treated and reinvested – in particular whether reinvestment will be contained within the MDC's boundary or allocated more widely.

We are neutral in relation to the proposal for the MDC to grant discretionary rates relief.

The strength and transparency of the governance of the MDC and clarity around its function and how it relates to and operates with Westminster City Council is of vital importance in engendering support and in ensuring it supports growth and improvement.

***The composition of the MDC's Board and Planning Committee***

We are keen to ensure local voices are heard in decisions related to Oxford Street and that community benefit is secured. We therefore welcome the three Board places for Westminster Council to facilitate this.

New West End Company as the Business Improvement District for Oxford Street representing all significant retailers and landowners should have a statutory place on the MDC Board.

**Q2. The Mayor considers the pedestrianisation of Oxford Street would help to deliver his vision for the area and support its regeneration. What are your views on the principle of pedestrianising Oxford Street?**

We strongly recognise the need for improvement on Oxford Street and would like to see significant upgrades to its public realm, accessibility and management so that it adds positively to the wider district including Marylebone. We recognise that pedestrianisation is one possible solution to this. We have some specific concerns about pedestrianisation which will need more detailed analysis and consideration to ensure there are not unintended detrimental impact to Marylebone and other surrounding areas:

**1) Side Streets:**

We are concerned that the environment of side streets abutting Oxford Street – which form key links and gateways between Marylebone and Oxford Street – will deteriorate and not fulfil their potential to encourage footfall between the districts. Pedestrianisation could leave these streets dominated by bus stands, loading, taxi ranks, ebike parking, private hire and delivery vehicles to facilitate the pedestrianisation.

As set out above we feel the key side streets have the potential to support the wider vision for Oxford Street if treated correctly.

A timed pedestrianisation of the section from Orchard Street to Oxford Circus eg: 10am-10pm with loading allowed outside these hours – would reduce the impact of deliveries in side streets.

**2) Management**

Pedestrianisation of this significant space will require a well-funded management regime to ensure the street is safe, clean and well maintained. We would like reassurance that sufficient budget will be available on an ongoing basis to secure the required resources to achieve this.

A time limited pedestrianisation of eg: 10am-10pm would reduce the requirement overnight significantly.

**3) Displacement of Traffic:**

The potential displacement of vehicular traffic onto the streets surrounding Oxford Street is a concern that could also detract from the success of improvement on Oxford Street. We would like to understand the impact in relation to local traffic flows and air quality.

**In summary:**

Baker Street Quarter Partnership is strongly supportive of the improvement of Oxford Street and therefore of the MDC as a vehicle to realise this. We would like to see a key focus on, and the inclusion of, the key side streets north of Oxford Street into Marylebone. We recognise pedestrianisation as one option to achieve improvement but would like to see further analysis in relation to the wider impact of this in particular in relation to the same side streets, street management and traffic displacement.

Penny Alexander

**Chief Executive**

1 May 2025