

**The Mayfair Residents Group Response
2nd Oxford Street Consultation
3 January 2018**

We do **not** support the proposal to pedestrianise Oxford Street. We believe that this major reconfiguration of the landscape would significantly damage the surrounding District despite “promises” to the contrary.

At present there are proposals and studies for key areas such as management, enforcement and accessibility, but no concrete plans have been produced. As there are no details available, these items cannot be questioned, nor costed, nor allocated specific funding, nor is there any idea who/what would be needed for implementation, nor is there a schedule for implementation. The idea seems to be to make a decision on pedestrianisation in haste without examining the true cost in monetary or, even more important, in human terms.

Pedestrian safety, based on the extra numbers expected to arrive/leave via Crossrail, has been cited time and again as the critical reason for the pedestrianisation of Oxford Street, yet the long-awaited new figures could not even be provided in time for the consultation so that people could scrutinise them. Whether these new figures are realistic given the rapidly changing state of retail (online purchasing) and the new shopping areas that are being developed or expanded elsewhere (Westfield x 2, St. James Market, Covent Garden, Brent Cross etc.), often with parking and bus access as well as trains, is very much open to question. Even Primark is opening a new store outside of the West End.

The strongest lobby supporting the pedestrianisation proposal seems to be those who wish to attract more shoppers into this area by turning Oxford Street into an outdoor shopping mall, wooing visitors with bread and circuses. Apart from creating a host of problems for the surrounding District, it is almost certain that such a configuration would require HVM barriers, a serious cost both financially and in terms of being able to provide any flexibility in the use of Oxford Street for requirements such as disabled access, servicing, major works or the Emergency Services.

The undue haste with which this complex project is being pushed forward is astounding. Despite protestations to the contrary, many people believe that it is a “done deal” and, as a result, they are not bothering to respond to the current consultation. This situation was exacerbated by the Mayor’s own comments on November 6 at the opening session of this round of consultation. A number of people that we have spoken to actually believed that the consultation was only for those who live locally and that they were not supposed to participate even though they worked in Oxford Street/the District. One wonders what the final figures for respondents will truly reflect.

NORTH MAYFAIR

North Mayfair is the southern section of the so-called "Oxford Street District". It is a working city in a Georgian landscape which would be badly affected by the plan to pedestrianise Oxford Street whether that be a 24-hour closure as currently proposed or an earlier mentioned plan for more limited closure. We have not addressed all of the arguments against the proposal(s), but we know that others in adjoining areas, more knowledgeable, will be raising important issues such as air pollution and bus routes in addition to their own more local concerns. The following sections discuss areas of particular concern in North Mayfair.

Traffic Flow

Brook Street is the nearest street of any size south of Oxford Street. Brook Street between Grosvenor Square and Hanover Square is periodically subject to congestion and at times comes to a standstill. The new two-way system has a pinch point between Davies Street and New Bond Street which is already throwing up additional problems. Anything which prevents traffic turning out of Bond Street west into Brook Street risks blocking the Brook Street/Bond Street junction and creating tailbacks in two directions. Extra traffic including vehicles/cycles/pedicabs would seriously exacerbate this growing problem which in turn would increase pollution, noise and traffic jams during the day and at night.

Brook Street is surrounded by a multitude of small shops, offices, eating places and residences which makes it very difficult to rationalise deliveries/pick-ups in order to reduce the traffic flow. On top of the myriad deliveries in this area, you need to allow for an army of window cleaners, shopfitters, maintenance men, rubbish collectors and utility work (never-ending). These people also need space to park/unload/load.

Brook Street has a large and expanding 5-star hotel with ballroom (Claridge's) which is adjacent to the Lancashire Court area, an ever-growing bar/restaurant quarter. Both sites attract numerous taxis/minis/chauffeurs who do not have enough parking/waiting space as it is. This area is part of a "luxury quarter" with many high spenders who do not take trains or buses. To add to the congestion, day or night, risks putting off people who want to shop/eat/stay here.

Moreover, East Mayfair, and in particular Northeast Mayfair, is earmarked for an increase in so-called "density of development". There have already been many additional flats built in the area and currently even more residential, office

and hotel units are being built or are planned. All of these new units will require more deliveries and more passenger pick-ups/drop-offs. Also, now that Bond Street has been configured as a cart track with limited loading/unloading times, there is even more pressure on the side streets, including Brook Street, to provide additional stopping space for loading/unloading, which in turn will create more congestion. The opening of the two new Crossrail ticket halls, eventually connecting to Heathrow Airport, will add to vehicle movements by bringing in people with luggage looking for transport to/from their accommodation.

Lastly, it is not at all clear how the many new two-way traffic systems (Baker Street/Gloucester Place/Tottenham Court Road/Brook Street) will eventually bed in and what effect the combined new configuration will have on traffic flow in any individual area of the West End, models or no models, given the ever-changing landscape.

Construction/Refurbishment

Northeast Mayfair has been undergoing massive building/refurbishment work for many years now which is scheduled to continue for some time to come (3-5 years at least). In addition to the extensive delivery and passenger traffic, there will be large construction vehicles sharing the narrow roads and a diminishing amount of parking/loading space in very tight, crowded surroundings.

There is a long and growing list of upcoming large projects which will adversely impact traffic flow in North Mayfair. The oversite development above the Crossrail western ticket hall in Davies Street is scheduled to start in 2019 and to run for two years. The hotel at the west end of Grosvenor Square will continue to keep the west end of the Square closed for some time. The huge GPE site over and adjacent to the eastern Crossrail ticket hall will not be completed until 2020. There are several large buildings in Bond Street, both north and south of Brook Street, which have/are seeking permission to demolish their structures behind the facades. Some of the work in Bond Street will require large vehicles to back into/drive out of the narrow opening to Haunch of Venison Yard, thereby blocking traffic both in Brook Street and at the Brook/Bond junction, plus 27/29 Brook Street, opposite the difficult Haunch of Venison Yard entrance, which requires serious remedial work including a new roof, work estimated to last a year. There is substantial work planned on the buildings on the north side of Brook Street between Davies Street and South Molton Lane and behind. Further, there is the extensive public realm work to be done in Hanover Square. All of these sites will add to the traffic congestion in this very small, complex area.

As an aside, one thing which did not appear to be covered in the consultation is an explanation of how, if Oxford Street is pedestrianised, construction work/major shopfitting in Oxford Street itself can be achieved when it involves buildings which are without accessible backs?

Pedestrian/Cycle Safety

There are a host of black spots across North Mayfair which are already of concern with regard to pedestrian and cycle safety. Additional traffic will just make these worse. The following are but a few of the concerns in detail.

There is no crossing provided at the South Molton Street/South Molton Lane/Avery Row junction where many people cross (although there is much talk of having safer crossing points in Wigmore Street). Currently there are many vehicles in this section of Brook Street doing u-turns, stopping/parking where they shouldn't (blocking the single eastbound lane) and driving/parking on the pavements. All of these manoeuvres pose safety hazards for other street users. The traffic lanes in this part of the street are too narrow for requirement and cycles and mopeds/motorbikes constantly race east up the westbound lane at speed towards Bond Street rather than sit in traffic which puts both pedestrians and themselves at risk.

The opening of the Crossrail western ticket hall will exacerbate these safety issues as there will be even more pedestrians crossing Brook Street via the pinch point. Add to this the instances of bicycles (and even moped/motorbikes) riding on the pavements, in pedestrian zones such as Avery Row and South Molton Street, or riding through Do Not Enter signs/red traffic lights, (all of which are not isolated instances in Brook Street and which have become worse with the arrival of companies like Deliveroo and Uber Eats) and you have a very congested area indeed without the addition of any more vehicles, cycles or pedicabs banned from Oxford Street day and night.

Further, if Davies Street north of St. Anselm's Place is reopened to service Stratford Place, how would this new layout work? Would the many vehicles which need to deliver to/service South Molton Street be using this section of road as well? The plans show loading bays both north and south of South Molton Lane and a large loading bay in Weighhouse Street accessible by turning in via Davies Street. How safe would this traffic layout be for the people entering/exiting the Crossrail western ticket hall or crossing to South Molton Street/Lane? It is interesting that the eastern ticket hall opens onto pedestrianised spaces, certainly during the rush hours, but the same does not seem to be necessary for the western ticket hall?

Also, why has someone introduced a contraflow cycle lane in Weighhouse Street, between Binney Street and Gilbert Street? Weighhouse Street is not that wide and, with the opening of the western ticket hall, there will be an increase in pedestrian traffic in addition to vehicles turning into and out of this stretch of road? The addition of a contraflow lane is not safe for pedestrians nor for cyclists.

Evening/Night-time Noise

You have far too many residents to allow deliveries/pick-ups or rubbish collections overnight, i.e. after 11pm and before 6/7am. You now have more residents in North Mayfair than in earlier years. You also have the substantial part of a Peabody Estate with many elderly and ill residents located between Gilbert Street and Balderton Street right up against Oxford Street itself.

It is wishful thinking to believe that you have worked out how to implement quiet night-time deliveries/collections. "Quiet" deliveries/collections are not all about engines and rubber wheels on trolleys by a long shot. North Mayfair is an area where there are many bedrooms located directly over the street, on or near a through street. People need to be able to open their lounge/bedroom windows for air and they need to be able to sleep at night.

Moreover, noise shoots down the side streets which means that there are issues, not only with night-time deliveries/collections, but also with night-time Oxford Street work. Occasional work such as utility work or emergency repairs or even putting up the Christmas lights is one thing, but deliveries or lengthy works which take place night after night are another.

Allowing activities/events on Oxford Street after a reasonable hour would be detrimental to the health and well-being of the many surrounding residents. Allowing activities/events in Oxford Street in the early evening on anything other than a very occasional basis is unacceptable. Passing traffic or people can be tolerated, they are background noise. Organised activities which include things like music, drums, amplifiers, microphones or crowds are intrusive.

Some activities are intolerable even during the day for residents, offices/shops and many cafes/restaurants. These activities include buskers and pedicabs (moving or parked) playing amplified music, stores blasting music out of their open doorways or people walking around with speakers playing loud music. A pedestrianised Oxford Street would end up attracting more of these activities.

ASB

The plan to pedestrianise Oxford Street would generate more anti-social behaviour both in Oxford Street and in the surrounding areas. There would be even more individuals attracted by visitors or by vehicle free spaces such as skateboarders, rollerbladers, buskers with amplifiers, beggars and pickpockets, not to mention those cyclists and pedicabs who do not think that they have to abide by any rules. You can see them today in and around Bond Street Station/South Molton Street. The more pedestrian space available, the more ASB generated, which would in turn spill, or at times be driven, into the District's smaller streets, making it more difficult to police, especially after dark.

Rubbish/Cleansing

Where in fact would all of the rubbish bags/cardboard that currently sits stacked up in large piles in Oxford Street at night, for example in front of Disney or Bond Street Tube Station, be left for collection? Would they now be piled up in the smaller side streets to await pick-up? Would they be put out late in the evening and/or left under residential buildings? Adding more large rubbish collections in the narrow side streets would do nothing to improve the traffic flow. Who would clean the pavements in all of these side streets (as in wash down the streets, not just sweep them) after the collections and at what time?

At present the state of rubbish collection generally in North Mayfair following the growth in the number of new food outlets and the seating added to existing outlets is already under strain and not functioning to a reasonable standard either in terms of collection or of street cleaning. Would any money allocated for cleaning in future keep the entire "District" clean, or would it only cover the "shopping" streets like Oxford/Bond/N. Audley/Duke Street.

Toilets

Everyone's favourite topic and someone else's problem. There are not enough toilets now. To pedestrianise Oxford Street without proper provision for public toilets is to increase the problem in the side streets, the small passageways and the doorways of residences, offices and shops. Many people, but not all, use the toilets in department stores during the day in lieu of public toilets. What happens during the 12 or so hours the department stores are not open and what happens to those who are nowhere near a department store when the need arises? Most takeaway food outlets do not have toilets. Once you have drunk your coffee, where do you go to find a loo? What if you have children with you? What if you have just come off of/are about to board a train or a bus, here do you find a toilet, especially after hours?

Accessibility - Buses

In Mayfair there are many people who use the Oxford Street buses including residents, workers and visitors. You have an aging population, people who are disabled, people on low wages and an army of late evening/night-time/early morning staff such as cleaners, security personnel, shelf stackers, etc. These people use the buses in Oxford Street to shop, to get to/from the hospital, to get to/from work. They are not going to switch to the train. Some cannot switch due to cost or availability in terms of time (the need to set out for or return from work before/after the trains run), some cannot due to their journey start/finish point, some do not wish to, some are even afraid to go underground. The current “plans” are not sufficient to overcome the problems these people would now face with their buses pushed further away.

The new Bond Street station is not as “step free” as advertised - three lifts to get to/from platform level? Even if those with mobility problems/shopping manage to use the Bond Street “step free” station or the Crossrail station when open, it is possible that their entry/changeover/destination station may very well not be “step free”. Many tourists/shoppers along Oxford Street, when offered a choice between underground and bus, choose to take the bus. It is not clear whether this is a financial decision or because they want to take in the scenery or because they already have a bus pass or hopper fare.

Emergency Services

Last, but certainly not least, is the issue of access for the Emergency Services. You frequently see the Emergency Services racing up and down the Oxford Street, both day and night. It is a major through route for the entire West End. When asked, TfL always says that they are “talking to the emergency services” about the plan to pedestrianise Oxford Street. P10 of the consultation booklet said that they would “explain later in this section...how we would ensure the emergency services would have access when required”, but this explanation could not be found. Does “access” actually include a quick through route?

One wonders what the Emergency Services’ honest answer would be if they themselves had to choose whether or not to pedestrianise Oxford Street, especially if HVM had to be installed. At the end of the day those taking the decision whether or not to pedestrianise Oxford Street do not live or work in this area. It is not the planners nor their loved ones who are affected by restricting the access of these vital services even further than they already have been by cuts to their budgets and the closure of stations.