

# MAYOR OF LONDON

**Cllr Nickie Aiken**

Leader of the Council  
Westminster City Council  
Westminster City Hall  
5 Strand  
London WC2N 5HR

**Date:** 03 JUL 2018

*Dear Nickie,*

On 7 June you announced that you were abandoning our joint proposals to transform Oxford Street and its district. You made this decision unilaterally with no attempt to compromise. This is not partnership working and is at odds with the development of the proposals over the last two years, which were agreed at joint boards chaired by your Deputy Leader and by your Chief Executive.

We had until now shared a vision for Oxford Street, that we would make it the world's best outdoor shopping experience and an unrivalled place to live, work and visit. Your decision has torn up our joint plan to deliver this vision and leaves real uncertainty about what will replace it. I note you published a Cabinet Report regarding your proposals on 29 June for consideration on 9 July but this leaves many questions unanswered.

Oxford Street's success is of London-wide and national significance. As the busiest street for shopping in Europe, it should be a source of pride and showcase the best of our city and country. Instead it is blighted by overcrowded and poor quality public realm, heavy traffic and the attendant problems of pollution and road danger.

We are all aware of the structural changes facing the retail sector. This was brought into sharp focus on the same day you withdrew from our project, when House of Fraser announced that it will close its Oxford Street flagship store. Ultimately, the risk of not proceeding with ambitious and meaningful change is a risk to London's future competitiveness on the national and international stage. This has implications not only for the businesses on Oxford Street, but the economies of London and the UK, and ultimately all of our constituents.

You have said that results from our joint consultation and your successful recent election convinced you that traffic removal was not wanted by residents. As you know, the consultation results showed London supported our proposals, with almost three quarters of more than 22,000 respondents in favour of transformation. I am well aware that many local residents had concerns about the scheme. However, our joint work showed that the concerns about traffic displacement would not have materialised and my team were willing to discuss changes to our proposals that still delivered a transformed district.

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You have now said that you will bring forward completely new proposals. It is essential that any development of a new scheme recognises and addresses the core challenges, in particular:

- **Visitor experience:** our plans would have revolutionised the experience of visiting the West End and helped ensure its continued attractiveness. The proposals to transform Oxford Street, supported by the business community and Londoners, would have given the retail heart of London a fabulous public realm, full of life and spectacle, to compete with other world cities. When we met last year we agreed on that aim. I am very concerned to hear from the recent West End Partnership meeting that you now do not believe retail is central to Oxford Street's future. The district's retailers, and the many thousands of people they employ, will share my concern and will want to understand what you see for the future of the area.
- **Economy:** the West End is home to 100,000 jobs and generates income to the Treasury upwards of £2bn per annum. Through our plans to invest in the West End, we estimated an increase of 20,000 jobs and £4bn in tax receipts over a fifteen year period. I am keen to understand how your proposals will meet these targets to grow London's economy, which will benefit London, the UK and of course our constituents.
- **Air quality:** you have publicly stated that this is a "red herring", but this is not the case. Oxford Street has been identified as the world's most toxic for NO<sub>2</sub>. I have already reduced the number of buses on the street by 40 per cent and I am introducing the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) next year, which will make a significant improvement. However, even after these changes, Oxford Street will still exceed legal pollution limits and needs further action for its air to be safe. Our joint proposals offered a solution to this and delivered air quality improvements across the surrounding neighbourhoods – the Evening Standard reported on 28 June that banning vehicles from Oxford Street would reduce NO<sub>2</sub> exceedances by three quarters – that will now not happen. A credible alternative strategy is needed as part of your new proposals.
- **Crowding:** people visiting Oxford Street already suffer from a level of crowding that is uncomfortable and deters visitors. This December, Elizabeth line trains will start serving Oxford Street, with stations at Bond Street and Tottenham Court Road. This is a huge opportunity for businesses in the area to grow and create jobs. There will be an immediate increase in visitors and by the time the full service is running in December 2019 Bond Street station alone is expected to see 70,000 more entries and exits each day.
- **Road danger:** sadly, Oxford Street is one of the most dangerous roads in our city. It is unacceptable that on average one person is killed and 60 people are injured in road traffic incidents each year. Your own consultants estimated that our joint proposals would have reduced this by more than 50 per cent. It is essential that any new scheme for the road recognises and addresses this issue with credible proposals to reduce the number of injuries on the road. As the highway authority for Oxford Street, legal and moral responsibility for preventing such accidents rests with Westminster City Council.

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- **Protection of the public:** over recent weeks we have been remembering those injured and killed in a series of attacks on London's streets last year. Our proposals included measures to protect the significant numbers of people using Oxford Street, including from attacks using vehicles. Londoners will expect you to set out how you will address this risk, and the more plans are delayed, the longer the public is exposed to this risk.

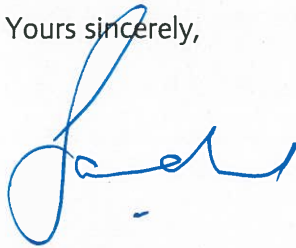
I have made it clear that Oxford Street and the West End are too important for me to walk away, but delivering meaningful change does require a partnership approach. As you are aware, Transport for London (TfL) had set aside funds to invest in transforming Oxford Street, but I will only be willing to commit funds to proposals that meet the challenges outlined above and deliver what is needed for the long-term future of London and the West End. I have already invested more than £8m in good faith in this project and Londoners would expect me to be mindful of this in taking future decisions about investment in Westminster.

I note that your Cabinet report proposes to use a further £400,000 of TfL Local Implementation Plan (LIP) funding to develop what would seem to be a draft strategy for the area, without in fact delivering anything on street. Given the very extensive work already done, my team at TfL has questioned the value of any more strategy work. I note there has been no prior discussion with TfL about the proposed use of these funds, which presumably involves deferral of other projects. To make it clear, given the extensive funding already spent on design, no TfL funding of any sort is to be used without prior discussion and agreement.

I now need to understand what you intend to deliver for Oxford Street and how it will tackle the challenges set out above. You have said you will develop these over the summer and I would ask to see details by the end of September. I believe this is a reasonable timescale for you to assess your options and there is a need to move quickly in the context of existing safety risks and the Elizabeth line's full opening in December 2019.

Finally, noting the significant interest in this matter, I have made a copy of this letter publicly available.

Yours sincerely,



**Sadiq Khan**  
Mayor of London