

Oxford Street transformation

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The look, feel and use of space: Activation and Public Art

Our ambitions for the Oxford Street district include not just the delivery of improvements to the public spaces in the area, but also making better use of how these spaces look and feel as well as how they are used. This should build on the existing strong activity in the district, but look to go further, and positively contribute to both stage s of the transformation of the street and spaces.

The new spaces delivered by this project will provide the much needed room for pedestrians to experience and explore the district, and furthermore provides opportunities to distinguish Oxford Street and its side streets from other retail destinations. For the district to grow and improve as a great place to live, work and visit, it will need to effectively compete with other world class destinations and therefore requires a strategy to understand the future trends and options available to achieve the ambitions.

Alongside the public realm strategy and district management plan, Westminster City Council and Transport for London are working together to commission an activation strategy, as well as securing a Creative Director to lead public art interventions at key locations across the district. Activation is all about how the space is used and is brought to life through a programme of activities and temporary events or installations, while public art provides focal points for admiring or interacting with. These work streams will all be working together to ensure that the streets and spaces are of the highest quality, and that the activity within the spaces encourages more people to enjoy the area. This should help to ensure that Oxford Street is a unique destination that encourages everyone to visit, shop, rest, meet and enjoy spending time in the district.

These pieces of work will be implemented in the first stage of transformation as a rolling programme, evolving and responding to the changes in how people use the streets and informing the design development of the second stage of transformation.

Public Art

A Creative Director will be responsible for ensuring the best artists and practitioners are involved in the creation of unique and distinct public art for the district. The design solutions will require highly creative and artistic interventions to reflect the importance of the project and reinforce the reputation as the creative capital of the world. These pieces will include using innovative and attractive designs for

functional seating, ambient lighting, planting, security measures as well as pieces of art, which are multi-functional or celebrated for their beauty and form. They can be specifically designed to suit their locations, and could range from large scale art works to smaller scale pieces which will provide orientation and wayfinding, but also be discovered by visitors who explore the district.

As Oxford Street is an internationally renowned destination, the artists and artwork will be of the highest quality and imagination. A principal piece of art proposed is the artwork for the length of Oxford Street which will celebrate the start of the transformation of the street and the district.

Activation and Experiential Strategy

Oxford Street has become a predominantly retail experience, it is recognised that in the future retail will change to reflect different consumer habits, but also the street and district itself will evolve in response to any traffic changes introduced.

Increasingly, retail destinations are providing activities and interventions, either as pop-up or programmed, to activate spaces and create a different experience at different times of the day and year.

The partners are promoting more dedicated public spaces across the district both on Oxford Street as well as on the streets that connect with it. The potential increase in space for people will mean that while its primary purpose is to provide a comfortable environment for pedestrians, it also provides the opportunity to manage these spaces differently though providing more experience based content.

An example of how activation and public art can potentially enliven a space can be seen in the artists impression below of Old Cavendish Street looking north; currently an underused pedestrian public space could be increased and opened up, featuring playful elements such as water features and unusual benches, alongside more functional seating.

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