

FULL SCALE PEDESTRIANISATION IN WEST END RULED OUT

Westminster City Council has unveiled its latest plans for Oxford, Regent and Bond Street which will give the shopping streets a makeover in time for 2012.

The world famous retailing triumvirate of Oxford, Regent and Bond Streets will have wider shopper-friendly pavements, a series of side street 'oases' for al fresco dining, and cutting edge lighting - but full scale pedestrianisation has been ruled out of the £40million plans.

MORE SPACE TO STROLL

Westminster Council together with its key partners Transport for London, the Mayor of London's Office, and the New West End Company, say this redesign of the streets and a cut in traffic, along with a wayfinding scheme encouraging visitors to walk around the West End will give shoppers more space to stroll.

Sir Simon Milton, the leader of Westminster City Council, said: "Wholesale pedestrianisation of Oxford Street is totally unworkable. Our plans make the West End more pedestrian-friendly, while ensuring it retains the vibrancy and excitement which sets it apart from cloned malls not just in this country, but around the world.

"These three streets are the country's premier shopping, dining and entertainment destinations, and form part of a reinvigorated and thriving local community which gives the West End its life beat. We are already making excellent progress with tangible improvements happening on the ground right now, and this final plan will see over 100 actions taken to transform and do justice to these world famous streets."

OLD QUEBEC STREET TRANSFORMED

The first of 14 'oases' which will see side streets pedestrianised, or existing areas enhanced, has already been completed. Old Quebec Street has been transformed into an al fresco area, with scope for public art and performances.

The street was reopened last November following work in partnership with the Portman Estate, Great Portland Estate, the Cumberland Hotel, New West End Company and Transport for London. Regent Place is next in line for a makeover with designs currently being drawn up. The Legible London project has already started to deliver new, ground-breaking wayfinding in the area, to guide tourists and Londoners alike more efficiently and helpfully.

These two projects are part of a whole range of actions which have already been delivered, and together with the installation of 757 extra motorcycle bays, 60 extra blue badge bays, and the VIP car free days, and a raft of other initiatives are worth £8 million.



GOLF BOARDERS TO GO

As well as new high quality paving, giving shoppers up to 1.8m extra room, the council is installing a column of iconic mast lights all along the north side of Oxford Street. The Oxford, Regent and Bond St (ORB) Action Plan also features a crackdown on garish signage and advertising, as such activities mimic cut-price promotions in down-market high streets and erode the unique attraction of a trip to the West End. Golf boarders, who strap giant signs to their bodies to evade planning restrictions, will also be removed using new legislation which comes into force this May. Charity

collectors, or chuggers as they've become known, will be tackled through a voluntary scheme with the trade body representing them. If that fails the council will resort to legal powers which come into force next year to ensure they operate responsibly.

REDUCING THE TRAFFIC

But key to the success of the ORB Action Plan is a phased reduction in the amount of traffic, especially along Oxford Street which is currently choked by up to 220 buses an hour travelling in each direction along its busiest section.

Quoted in the ORB Action Plan, TfL Commissioner Peter Hendy, writes: "Transport for London is working with Westminster City Council and New West End Company to provide innovative ways of delivering an even better retail environment whilst maintaining good public transport services in the area.



Peter Hendy

Good progress has been made during 2007 including measures which have improved pedestrian accessibility on Oxford Street. The "Legible London" wayfinding project was successfully launched in November 2007, in the Bond Street area, and will serve as a prototype for schemes across London."

New West End Company's Chief Executive, Richard Dickinson, adds: "We feel that regeneration of the area should be based on the principle of achieving high levels of sustainability, both in terms of buildings and the transport and servicing arrangements that underpin it. We hope that this document will provide a blueprint for the improvement of the area, respecting the needs of everyone who lives in, works in or visits the area included in this Action Plan."



LONDON CITY AIRPORT JOINS THE UK'S TOP SUPERBRANDS

London City Airport is joining the UK's list of top 500 business brands, the only airport to be named a 'Business Superbrand'. Ranked alongside other major brands including British Airways, Air France and one of the airport's owners, AIG, it continues to be the hub of choice as demonstrated by passenger numbers in 2008. In January 2008 it saw a 25 per cent increase over the previous year, with February showing an increase of 23 per cent over the same month last year.

Richard Gooding OBE, Chief Executive of London City Airport said: "It is exciting to see how, in only 20 years, London City Airport has grown from a small regional airport serving almost 133,000 passengers in its first full year of trading, to a staggering 2.9 million passengers in 2007. More and more business travellers are recognising the benefits of London City Airport.