

Soho Business Alliance Ltd
One Ropemaker Street
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London, United Kingdom, EC2Y 9AW

<https://www.sohoba.co.uk>

SOHO
BUSINESS ALLIANCE

Letter to the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan and Walking & Cycling Commissioner, Dr. Will Norman

Dear Sirs,

We are writing on behalf of the Soho Business Alliance (SBA), a unified voice representing over 150 businesses in the Soho area. We formed in 2020 to address the challenges of the pandemic and our alliance now focuses on the recovery, prosperity and growth of Soho business by forging deep local partnerships. We represent sectors including hospitality, retail, and property and well as creative industries, music venues, and more.

The SBA is dedicated to safeguarding Soho's iconic status as a world-class destination for independent retail, cutting-edge cuisine, live entertainment and our unique cultural heritage. The area is the gateway to Theatreland, providing the food and drinks court for the West End Central Activity Zone (CAZ) and is home to world renowned and unique live music venues, not found anywhere else. We are committed to protecting and growing the economic diversity of our area through engagement with businesses, residents, amenity groups and Westminster City Council.

We are aware of the proposed Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC) for Oxford Street and feel that Soho has suffered in recent years in a very similar way to Oxford Street and believe it is time for change. We would like to strongly advocate for Soho's inclusion into the area covered by the MDC so that the future prosperity of the nation's shopping street can also be supported with a food and leisure destination that makes this part of the West End the complete package.

As well as the obvious benefits for our businesses, we are concerned that if Soho is excluded from the MDC area, there may be an adverse impact on pedestrian permeability, cycle routes and traffic flows. Soho needs to form part of the area being transformed under the MDC to ensure that Oxford Street does not have a negative impact on Soho's streets.

You may not be aware that in a very similar way to Oxford Street, Soho has suffered with years of neglect in terms of highway maintenance and public realm improvement. The pavements are narrow and inaccessible, the lighting is poor in places making it feel unsafe for vulnerable groups, in particular for women and girls, there is limited opportunity for on street surveillance because of the narrow pavements and CCTV has been completely removed from the busiest streets. Traffic runs on every street and there is no space for greening, certainly not making any progress in terms of future climate resilience. There are no places for people to rest, pavements are too narrow for pushchairs and wheelchairs and, in comparison to the historic centres of other cities, there is no space for alfresco dining.

In the 2000's at the same time as Oxford Street, Soho had a community led Action Plan put in place (adopted in 2007) that looked to try and invest in these areas of concern, but consistently funding from the action plan and the Soho area has been cut. Any future plans to try and regenerate the public realm have been met with fierce opposition from a small minority of local residents. Similarly to the Oxford Street District this has led to inertia from the council seeing the area as one which is too difficult to work in. You will be aware of the delicate political balance of the West End Ward and we believe that this is making it very difficult for council officers to push forward with important

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public realm initiatives that have been done in other parts of the West End with less 'difficult' stakeholders.

As it is the area looks uncared for, feels uncomfortable and is not supporting or reflecting the absolute quality which sits behind the doors of independent businesses that we represent. The SBA has tried many times to engage with the council on all of these issues, but the area simply isn't a priority for them.

We believe by including the Soho area into the Oxford Street MDC we can work together to bring about changes that could revolutionise how this area is seen by the rest of the country and by the millions of visitors to the area. We would love to rival the historic entertainment centres of cities like Madrid, Barcelona and Bordeaux, where you have pedestrianised and low traffic shopping streets supported by the same in human scale, historic mixed-use neighbourhoods that welcome a complementary food and leisure experience to give a really fantastic offer to all people who live, work and visit by exhibiting truly cohesive 24-hour life.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and contribute our local expertise and energy to the development of the MDC which focusses on returning Oxford Street and Soho to some of the most vibrant and economically prosperous parts of London, if not the UK. The SBA is committed to working collaboratively with all stakeholders to ensure that Soho reaches its full potential as a world-class destination that London can be proud of.

We look forward to hearing from you,

RUPERT

Chair. Soho Business Alliance

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