# Oxford Street's candy shop invasion shrinks amid crackdown and regeneration plans



# The Transformation of Oxford Street: From Sweet Shops to Major Retailers

Oxford Street, renowned as London’s premier shopping district, continues to grapple with the remnants of a tumultuous retail landscape dominated by low-quality candy and souvenir shops. Despite ongoing efforts by local authorities to reclaim its image, the proliferation of these outlets, particularly during and after the pandemic, has posed a significant challenge.

### The Candy Store Invasion

During the height of the pandemic, Oxford Street witnessed a boom in US-style sweet stores, with the number of candy and souvenir shops reaching an alarming 40. These establishments, often offering overpriced and questionable merchandise, invaded spaces vacated by major retailers such as Topshop and House of Fraser. Critics argue these shops undermined the area's appeal, drawing complaints from both residents and tourists.

The Westminster City Council, tasked with regulating commercial activities, faced a daunting "whack-a-mole" scenario as they attempted to shut down these businesses, many of which were believed to evade upwards of £9 million in business rates. With a relentless focus on enforcement, officials have seen a gradual reduction in the number of such shops, currently standing at 18. This shift is attributed to increased vigilance, including significant court actions leading to over £1 million worth of counterfeit and potentially hazardous goods being seized from these outlets.

### The Council's Crackdown

Council leader Adam Hug has articulated the necessity for continued action against these rogue retailers. He remarked, “Our job is to protect people who visit the West End from being exploited,” emphasising the dire need to dismantle the exploitative business practices prevalent among some store owners. Among the more alarming recent incidents was a raid that uncovered an underground tunnel linked to a shop, leading to the seizure of £80,000 worth of fake goods.

The issue of illicit trading is compounded by the challenges faced by property owners who are often unaware of the dubious activities occurring in their rented spaces. The council has urged landlords to take greater responsibility to prevent damage to the high street's reputation. “Many businesses dissolve without ever filing accounts,” noted one authority source, further complicating enforcement efforts.

### The Broader Context of High Street Decline

The candy shop proliferation is part of a broader narrative of Oxford Street's decline. Once a symbol of retail vibrancy, the area has been marred by crime, homelessness, and the overarching presence of low-quality shops. Recent social unrest, highlighted by a TikTok-fuelled robbery spree in August 2023, has added to the sense of desperation surrounding the district. Notably, Brian Duffy, chief executive of Watches of Switzerland, labelled Oxford Street a "national embarrassment," calling for urgent revitalisation efforts.

In light of these challenges, the Mayor of London, Sir Sadiq Khan, has proposed a multi-faceted regeneration plan aimed at restoring the street's status. This includes the pedestrianisation of sections of Oxford Street and incentivising major retailers to return, with the hopes that their entry can uplift the area's commercial standing. Significant investments have already begun to materialise, including new stores from HMV and Ikea, signalling a potential shift away from candy shops.

### A Promising Future?

Despite the recent setbacks, a renewed sense of optimism is emerging. Dee Corsi, chief executive of the New West End Company, confirmed that candy stores now account for less than 1% of trading space on Oxford Street, heralding a significant reduction over the past year. With initiatives to support legitimate businesses, including rent-free shop opportunities as part of the "Meanwhile On: Oxford Street" scheme, there is potential for a brighter future.

As local officials strive to rejuvenate Oxford Street, they face an ongoing battle against the remnants of a bygone era of cheap, low-quality retail. The hope is that with continued enforcement, a collaborative effort among stakeholders, and the influx of reputable brands, Oxford Street can reclaim its position as a leading retail destination, free from the tarnish of unsightly souvenir stores.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14672037/Tacky-Oxford-Street-candy-sweet-souvenir-shops.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/oxford-street-candy-stores-defy-crackdown-police-raid-b1062843.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.westminster.gov.uk/news/leader-statement-candy-stores-and-souvenir-shops), [[3]](https://www.itv.com/news/london/2022-11-15/life-turns-sour-for-candy-shops-fleecing-customers-on-oxford-street), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/oxford-street-candy-shop-landlords-westminster-council-adam-hug-letter-b1083372.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14672037/Tacky-Oxford-Street-candy-sweet-souvenir-shops.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/dec/25/labour-to-crack-down-on-dodgy-candy-stores-in-push-to-revive-high-streets), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-63236472)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14672037/Tacky-Oxford-Street-candy-sweet-souvenir-shops.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/dec/25/labour-to-crack-down-on-dodgy-candy-stores-in-push-to-revive-high-streets)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.westminster.gov.uk/news/leader-statement-candy-stores-and-souvenir-shops), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/oxford-street-candy-shop-landlords-westminster-council-adam-hug-letter-b1083372.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14672037/Tacky-Oxford-Street-candy-sweet-souvenir-shops.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/news/leader-statement-candy-stores-and-souvenir-shops> - Westminster City Council leader Adam Hug addresses the proliferation of US-style candy and souvenir shops on Oxford Street, emphasizing the council's efforts to restore the area's reputation. He highlights the closure of 12 such stores in November 2022 and the subsequent opening of nine similar shops by February 2023, describing the situation as a 'whack-a-mole' challenge. The council has seized over £1 million worth of illegal goods and is urging property owners to take action against these retailers to prevent further damage to the high street's image and value.
3. <https://www.itv.com/news/london/2022-11-15/life-turns-sour-for-candy-shops-fleecing-customers-on-oxford-street> - ITV News reports on the decline of sweet and souvenir shops on Oxford Street following legal actions by Westminster City Council. The number of such stores decreased by a third, from 30 to 21, due to investigations into tax evasion and customer complaints. The council has taken legal action against these businesses, resulting in the closure of several and the recovery of unpaid business rates. The report highlights the council's ongoing efforts to address the issue and improve the area's commercial landscape.
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/oxford-street-candy-stores-defy-crackdown-police-raid-b1062843.html> - The Evening Standard discusses the resurgence of US-style candy and souvenir stores on Oxford Street, despite council crackdowns. The number of such stores has returned to 29, matching the peak in 2020, after initial reductions due to raids by Westminster City Council and police. These stores have been linked to the sale of counterfeit goods and unpaid business rates, estimated at £8 million. Council leader Adam Hug describes the situation as a 'whack-a-mole' challenge, with traders exploiting legal loopholes to evade enforcement.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/dec/25/labour-to-crack-down-on-dodgy-candy-stores-in-push-to-revive-high-streets> - The Guardian reports on the Labour Party's plans to address the proliferation of 'dodgy' candy stores on Oxford Street as part of efforts to rejuvenate Britain's high streets. The party aims to collaborate with councils to support legitimate businesses and curb the activities of these stores, which have been under investigation for tax evasion and selling counterfeit goods. The initiative includes proposals for a 'new shops bonus' to incentivize legitimate businesses to occupy high street spaces, countering the impact of illicit retailers.
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/business/business-news/oxford-street-candy-shop-landlords-westminster-council-adam-hug-letter-b1083372.html> - The Standard reports on Westminster City Council's efforts to address the issue of candy and souvenir shops on Oxford Street. Council leader Adam Hug has written to 19 property owners urging them to take action against these retailers, who collectively owe around £9 million in unpaid business rates. The council has seized over £1 million worth of illegal goods from these stores and is calling for landlords to evict tenants involved in such activities to help restore the area's commercial integrity.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-63236472> - BBC News covers Westminster City Council's seizure of over £200,000 worth of counterfeit goods from sweet and souvenir shops along Oxford Street. The confiscated items include fake designer watches, unsafe vapes, children's toys, and electrical chargers lacking safety labels. The council is investigating 30 of these stores for alleged tax evasion and unpaid business rates, estimated at £8 million. The operation is part of broader efforts to revitalize Oxford Street and attract reputable retailers to the area.