# Sadiq Khan’s pedestrianisation of Oxford Street risks erasing local voices and deepening decline



Sir Sadiq Khan’s latest move to pedestrianise a sizeable section of Oxford Street exposes the government’s growing reliance on superficial “revitalisation” schemes that ultimately fail the local communities they claim to serve. By banning traffic along approximately 0.7 miles from Oxford Circus to Marble Arch—and possibly extending further—he aims to mask the district’s ongoing decline with a shiny, pedestrian-friendly image. But these measures do little to address the root causes of the area’s desolation: the relentless economic crisis, the collapse of small retail businesses, and the erosion of community character under a misguided focus on tourism and urban spectacle.

Once the beating heart of London’s retail scene, Oxford Street has been battered by online shopping, economic hardship, and the consequences of pandemic lockdowns—factors that no amount of pedestrianisation can undo. Iconic stores have shut their doors, replaced by souvenir shops and counterfeit markets that epitomise the district’s decline. Instead of addressing these core issues—such as supporting local entrepreneurs and tackling crime—the Mayor’s plan seems more interested in cosmetic improvements. The proposed creation of a Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC), which would assume planning powers from Westminster City Council, risks centralising control and sidestepping local voices, further diminishing the democratic rights of residents and small business owners struggling to survive.

While the plan promises to attract international visitors and encourage investment, it overlooks the concerns of many grassroots voices who see this as another top-down project more focused on superficial glitz than genuine revitalisation. Critics argue that such centralised control distances decision-making from the needs of local communities and risks turning Oxford Street into a sterile, over-touristed zone catering primarily to tourists rather than the city’s residents. The former blocking attempts—once thwarted by Westminster—highlight the ongoing resistance among community groups who fear that this project prioritises corporate interests over local well-being.

Khan’s rhetoric portrays this pedestrianisation as a necessary step to “restore” Oxford Street, but it feels more like a distraction from the real crises facing London’s high streets. It’s a poor substitute for comprehensive support that includes safeguarding jobs, encouraging local entrepreneurship, and addressing the economic inequalities that threaten the city’s future. The effort to turn this iconic shopping street into a “world-class” destination is superficial if it ignores the livelihoods of those who have kept these streets alive for generations.

Furthermore, the plan raises serious questions about urban mobility—particularly how the rerouting of traffic and the disruption of public transport links will impact daily commuters, residents, and small retailers. Promises of a vibrant public space are hollow if the realities of increased congestion and accessibility challenges are not properly managed. Details on how these issues will be addressed are conspicuously absent, prompting skepticism that this initiative is more about image than substance.

In essence, this strategy is yet another example of how the current administration relies on showy projects to cover up deeper failures. Instead of fostering genuine community-led regeneration, it risks turning Oxford Street into a controlled showpiece—more pedestrian mall than thriving high street. Such schemes neglect the fundamental economic realities faced by small traders and local residents, leaving the district more hollowed out than ever. If London is serious about sustainable regeneration, it must reject these superficial fixes and instead invest in policies that empower local communities, support small businesses, and confront the structural problems head-on.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/oxford-street-pedestrianised-london-khan-b2770846.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/5313d5ec-d5e2-4e0c-910f-ca1aa55e7091> - London Mayor Sadiq Khan has confirmed the progression of plans to pedestrianise Oxford Street, following strong public and business support. According to a consultation conducted by the Greater London Authority between February and May, 66% of 6,642 respondents endorsed the proposal. Major retailers including Selfridges, John Lewis, and Ikea also support the initiative. The plan will see approximately a mile of the roadway pedestrianised, from Orchard Street to Great Portland Street. To implement the transformation, City Hall will establish a Mayoral Development Corporation within the year, collaborating with businesses, local authorities, and national government. The move aims to revitalise the area, which has faced economic challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of online shopping. Westminster council, which previously blocked similar initiatives in 2018 due to concerns about traffic and accessibility, now intends to work cooperatively to ensure the redevelopment benefits locals and visitors alike. Business groups, such as the London Chamber of Commerce and UKHospitality, have praised the proposal as a significant opportunity to reinvigorate one of the UK's most important commercial streets.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/2ee08d12-853b-4fb2-83e8-8fccec50de7e> - In a letter to the Financial Times, Tim Lord, Chair of The Soho Society, criticises London Mayor Sadiq Khan's handling of plans to improve Oxford Street. He refutes Khan’s claim that local residents blocked the mayor’s favoured option of pedestrianisation, emphasising that the abandoned plans reflected two years of collaborative efforts between local councils, businesses, and stakeholders, with limited resident input, not resident control. Lord raises concerns about Khan’s proposal to establish a Mayoral Development Corporation (MDC), which would shift planning authority from Westminster’s elected officials to the mayor and handpicked business leaders. He argues this action contradicts the Localism Act, which aims to empower local communities, and that Oxford Street does not qualify under the Act's development criteria as it is already developed. Lord also disputes Khan’s justification based on borough boundaries and criticises the mayor for failing to address the proliferation of problematic “American candy shops” and West End crime. He urges Khan to abandon the MDC initiative and support the existing local government-led improvement plan.
4. <https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2024/10/05/a-londres-oxford-street-va-etre-pietonnisee-dans-le-but-d-enrayer-son-declin-commercial_6344504_3234.html> - Pour contrer le déclin commercial de la célèbre Oxford Street à Londres, le maire Sadiq Khan prévoit de la piétonniser d'ici 2027, interdisant ainsi la circulation aux bus et taxis noirs. Historiquement une vitrine du commerce de détail au Royaume-Uni, cette rue a souffert de la concurrence du commerce en ligne, de la pandémie de Covid-19 et de la crise du coût de la vie, entraînant la fermeture de grands magasins comme Debenhams et House of Fraser. La pandémie a aussi conduit à une hausse de la petite criminalité et de la présence de magasins de souvenirs bon marché et de confiseries, souvent soupçonnés d'évasion fiscale et de vente de produits contrefaits. Cependant, des signes de reprise apparaissent, avec l'arrivée d’investisseurs majeurs comme Ikea et le retour de HMV, renouvelant l’espoir d’une revitalisation de cette artère emblématique.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/londons-oxford-street-could-go-traffic-free-under-mayors-plan-2024-09-17/> - London's Oxford Street may soon become pedestrian-only under a plan proposed by city mayor Sadiq Khan, aiming to attract more shoppers and boost economic activity. The proposal has gained support from Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, who believes it will create new jobs and enhance the night-time economy. Oxford Street draws around half a million visitors daily but has faced challenges, with many flagship stores closing post-COVID pandemic. The area's recovery has been slow as more people turn to online shopping and reduced office returns. Retailers and local councils have shown both support and concern, particularly regarding the rerouting of buses and access implications. The final decision rests pending approval from Rayner, who is also the housing and communities minister. The Labour Party is advocating for faster approval of such projects to stimulate economic growth.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/d4324f4f-3c39-480e-b300-6f7f06977699> - La famosa calle de Londres, Oxford Street, será peatonal bajo propuestas anunciadas por el alcalde Sadiq Khan para revitalizar la zona y convertirla en 'el principal destino comercial del mundo'. La calle central necesita una regeneración importante debido a la competencia del comercio en línea, el cierre de grandes almacenes y los efectos persistentes de la pandemia de COVID-19. A pesar de la oposición por la interrupción del tráfico y el acceso de personas discapacitadas, el plan ha ganado impulso tras la elección de un gobierno laborista. La renovación busca generar empleo, impulsar la actividad económica y revitalizar la economía nocturna londinense. Sin embargo, el Consejo de la Ciudad de Westminster, responsable de la calle, ha expresado preocupaciones y espera detalles sobre la duración del proyecto y cómo se abordarán las inquietudes locales. A pesar de un mejoramiento reciente en las tasas de vacantes en las tiendas, la intervención es considerada crucial para fortalecer la posición de Oxford Street frente a competidores globales.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx244r3n50xo> - Sadiq Khan said the plans would restore Oxford Street to its 'former glory'.