

CGCA comments on Covent Garden Neighbourhood Traffic Management Scheme

Residents in the area should have received a letter from Camden and Westminster regarding the Covent Garden Neighbourhood Traffic Management Scheme. The Councils, who have worked together on the proposal, are seeking the views of residents. The details of the proposed changes have been published at <https://coventgarden.commonplace.is/> and they are open for feedback until 13/09/21.

Residents have been asking CGCA if we can explain some more about the scheme and the rationale for the changes, so we have set out our understanding below. This is based on a number of discussions with Council Officers and the Traffic Consultants for the scheme.

We should start by making clear that this scheme is not just COVID related. There are actually two long-term objectives:

1. Traffic Reduction

A lot of traffic in the Covent Garden area is traffic using it as a through route. Traffic studies have shown that 90% of the traffic is using it as a “rat run” to avoid the main roads. This scheme aims to remove the opportunity for this and keep through-traffic on the main roads.

2. Physical Security

A security study of the Piazza area, with its large number of visitors, has recommended changes so that vehicles have reduced access to certain streets. By introducing access restrictions on some streets, others have to change from 1-way to 2-way.

The proposals address these 2 objectives with a single scheme across parts of both Westminster and Camden.

The majority of the changes are related to the first objective – traffic reduction. The scheme doesn't restrict access, but works by stopping traffic being able to pass through the area whilst still allowing access to all the streets. The changes are designed to make the routes through the area longer, and hence less attractive as rat runs. This is intended to dissuade cars from coming in, as it will take them longer than sticking to the main routes.

This approach has the benefit of reducing the amount of traffic which enters the area and reduces congestion and pollution. It makes it easier for those which do need to be in the area to move around. It has the disadvantage that, for residents who wish to drive to or from their homes, some of the routes will be longer, even if they may sometimes be faster. But CGCA's view is that the benefits for most people outweigh this disadvantage for a few.

The projections show that no street will experience traffic flows greater than they were before lockdown, and we believe that those with high levels of traffic flow before will experience far less if this scheme is implemented.

There have been a variety of proposals over the last 20 years to try and address this issue, but they have tended to focus on one part of the area. The difference now is that the Councils have been able to work together to develop a scheme so that there are not knock-on effects on either side of the Camden / Westminster border. COVID has provided the opportunity of both a revised process and some funding to see if this time we can make a difference to a longstanding issue.

You will of course have to form your own view about the scheme and the proposed changes, and respond to the consultation. Please make sure that you make clear in this whether you support the principle or not, even if you think there need to be some alterations to the scheme.

The points the CGCA has made to Officers about the scheme, and will continue to make, are as follows:

Closure Timings

Our mantra has always been “**Traffic management? YES. Pedestrianisation? NO!**”. So we have some doubts about the timed closures proposed in 4 Westminster streets. But even if timed closures can avoid past pitfalls, they should be in place only for the time required. Whilst we can understand there may be a desire by some businesses to have streets closed to vehicles during the day/evening when there are lots of pedestrians (eg: 10:00-22:00) we do not understand the benefit of keeping them closed between 22:00 and 07:00, as is proposed here. And we don't want the public realm closed only to be used as overspill commercial space for businesses, even during the day.

Cycling

We know that many cyclists already ignore road directions and the reduction in traffic levels will make this more common. It needs to be made clear on which streets two-way cycling is permitted and on which it isn't, for the benefit of both cyclists **and** pedestrians. Contraventions then need to be enforced. The scheme is unclear on this, stating that there is “potential two-way cycling” on certain streets and listing other streets where two-way cycling is permitted.

Dryden Street

There is a proposal for a timed closure of Dryden Street. But when Dryden Street is closed the route from Seven Dials to Great Queen Street would then require drivers to go as far South as Tavistock Street, adding at least 600m to the journey. We are asking for an alternative route, or for this to be removed from the plan.

Diversions for Road Closures

With the reduction in the number of entry and exit routes from the area it is more necessary to have clear diversionary routes identified for when a road is closed for any reason. At the moment this process seems very haphazard and can add significant length to journeys. We saw one recently where a 100m road closure required a 2km diversion! A plan for diversionary routes for key roads in the scheme needs to be designed in advance.

Tavistock Street

The security scheme in the Piazza area requires Tavistock Street to be made 2-way. In order for this to work the kerbs need to be kept as clear as possible. We suggest that the Santander bike stands on the North side are moved to another location to ensure the street is passable in both directions.

Signage

The scheme will only work if signage **outside** the scheme is clear to traffic before it gets here, and if it is included in route mapping software. This needs to be included in the detailed plans for implementation or there could be serious congestion from vehicles getting stuck, which would ruin everyone's hard work.

Residents Parking

The road direction changes of the COVID scheme in Seven Dials are included in this new scheme. That scheme also removed a significant number of residents bays. This new proposal does not say anything more about parking. However residents would like the bays reinstated as their loss is making it more difficult for those residents who have cars to find parking in the area. This is especially as an issue as the road changes also make it more difficult to get from one part of the area to another when looking for available space.

If you would like to know any more about the CGCA's views on the scheme please email your questions to licensing@coventgarden.org.uk.