
Project:	St Giles Circus	Job No:	71246
Subject:	Urban Gallery Advertising Application		
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Introduction

This note has been prepared in relation to the above advertising application (2020/1910/A) and to address comments made by Transport for London who have requested that certain conditions be applied to any consent on the grounds of highway safety. The effect of these conditions would be to prohibit animation of images on screens located within the building thus undermining the rationale on which the Urban Gallery building has been conceived and constructed.

Background

During pre-planning discussions related to the original 2012 planning application, potential concerns around Road Safety were raised. In response to these, the applicant's transport consultant (Steven Farthing) walked the site with LBC's highway officer (Steve Cardno). It was agreed that a Road Safety Audit (RSA) should be undertaken to consider potential issues resultant from screens within the urban gallery on road users and pedestrians.

A suitably qualified, independent, road safety auditor (TMS) was subsequently appointed to complete an RSA. The findings of the RSA were shared with LBC and the report was subsequently formally submitted as part of the planning application material for the St Giles Circus application.

The RSA concluded that *"Taking into account all of the above factors, it can be concluded that the effect of the screens on users will be acceptable from a road safety point of view."* It went on to say that *"However, additional measures could be adopted to optimise safety by reducing vehicle speed and creating a less traffic dominated street scene."* Such additional measures have been developed and since the planning application submission in 2012 and are being implemented. These include the £35m public realm West End Project which in turn ties into public realm created by Derwent's Soho Place scheme through the pedestrianisation of Sutton Row as shown on Figure 1 below. These schemes are immediately adjacent to the site on Charing Cross Road.



Derwent's Soho Place scheme and public realm

The RSA also contained the following relevant statements:

"Research on road side advertising suggests that drivers always give priority to the driving environment taking in non-essential information according to road conditions and whether there is sufficient 'spare capacity' to perform such tasks.

Where external stimuli are present in demanding circumstances drivers tended to adopt a 'glance' strategy taking repeated short duration views of less than 1 second to either side of the vehicle's path but maintaining awareness of vehicle conditions. The visibility angle for drivers means that the digital screen will only be behind the signals from a close distance (approximately 4m). At this distance drivers have already acknowledged the signal and are travelling at low speed.

Bus drivers will be seated in a high position and therefore the angle will be more acute and the screens will be positioned further above the signal heads. If the signals are disguised by the digital screens, backing boards can be fitted to the signal heads as optical aids."

The RSA has recently been reviewed by both Curtins and Iceni and concluded that its findings remain valid.

TfL's has raised concern in relation to the potential of those driving southbound on Charing Cross Road to be distracted by the north-facing screen within the gallery. Such a concern would only be valid in a situation where the louvres that form the façade of the building are open. The screen in question is located some 20m back from the edge of the building which in turn is some 4m away from the edge of the carriageway. Southbound traffic is limited to buses and taxis hence there will be a degree a familiarity amongst drivers who regularly use this route.

Drivers approach the gallery southbound along Charing Cross Road would only be able to see a proportion of the gallery's norther façade as this is obscured by entrance to Tottenham Court Road station which is of a similar height to the screens. Visibility of the gallery for drivers is therefore limited until they are relatively close to the building when their attention would primarily be on the signalised pedestrian crossing on Charing Cross Road. It can also be expected that driver's speed will also have reduced on approach to the pedestrian crossing. In a situation where the louvres are open, it is worth noting that these would retract to the western (Charing Cross Road) side of the building. In their retracted state the stacked louvres would create a visual barrier circa 1 to 2m wide which would obstruct driver's visibility of the screen.

The RSA notes on several occasions that road safety benefits where traffic speeds are reduced. The speed limit on Charing Cross at the time the RSA was undertaken was 30mph. This has since reduced to 20mph so can be expected to have consequential highway safety benefits.

Furthermore, it is noted that many shops and other buildings in the local area already have LED / animated type signage hence the Urban Gallery is not unique. Examples include the Benetton store on 89 Oxford Street where the majority of the internal façade is occupied by an LED screen that can show animated images.



Benetton's store at 89 Oxford Street

Conclusion

Based on the above, it can be concluded that the conclusions of the RSA remain valid i.e. that the scheme is acceptable from a road safety perspective. Additional measures identified in the RSA have been progressed and include a speed limit on Charing Cross Road, the West End Project's public realm improvements and Derwent's Soho Place scheme and pedestrianisation of Sutton Row.