Oxford Street to build 25m 'hill' to lure shoppers back

Temporary attraction is part of a £150m revamp of the West End shopping destination to make it more appealing to visitors

By Laura Cotton, Retail Editor
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Marble Arch will gain a climbable “hill” after lockdown ends in a bid to lure shoppers back to Oxford Street.

The temporary 25-metre high attraction will overlook the landmark at the western end of the famous shopping street and Hyde Park if it wins planning permission.

The move is part of a £150m push by Westminster City Council to overhaul the retail mecca after it started losing its allure to foreign visitors even before the pandemic struck.

The area’s appeal as a fashion destination has been dented by the comings and goings of tenants.

The hill will operate for six months starting in the summer, featuring a viewing platform and space for events and exhibitions.

The council will also regenerate the area’s streets and reduce pollution and congestion.

Jace Tyrrell, chief executive of New West End Company, which representing 600

An impression of Marble Arch Hill

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businesses, said: "The past 12 months have been the toughest on record for businesses on Oxford Street and the surrounding area, and these ambitious plans are a sign of a forward thinking, sustainable and agile future for the district."

James Raynor, chief executive of Grosvenor, said the UK's economic recovery was tied to the future success of London.

"You don't get one without the other. This reinvention is not just great news for visitors and businesses in the West End. It's helping the whole country get back on its feet," he added.

"It's brilliant to see such a confident, creative statement of intent in the new Oxford Street strategy."

Rachael Robathan, the leader of Westminster City Council, said the West End is the "engine" of the London economy.

She added: "We want to focus attention on this iconic centre of our city which has been increasingly overlooked and cement its status for the future as a key central London destination."

Artistic flourish brings life to empty shops

MTart, an artist talent agency set up by Marine Tanguy six years ago, has been working with retailers and property owners to install art in the shop windows of empty sites on Oxford Street to make them more visually appealing.

While it represents and helps up-and-coming artists worldwide to sell their work, it also focuses on tie-ups with cultural organisations and public bodies to deliver public art projects.

MTart has also collaborated with the Crown Estate to display a photography exhibition called One Love, occupying 12 metres of vacant shop fronts.

Similar projects will follow on and around Oxford Street. Tanguy says, "As a business owner you don't want to see businesses struggling, but it enables people to rethink spaces and that's a positive. (Revamping) Oxford Street was long overdue and it will force it to be a centre for Londoners too."
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