

Reducing Street Clutter in Central London



Reducing Street Clutter in Central London

Millie Mitchell, Oriane Nermond and Claire Harding

Published by Centre for London, October 2023

About the Authors

Millie Mitchell

Millie is a Senior Researcher at Centre for London. Before joining the Centre in 2022, Millie studied for a Master's degree in Regional and Urban Planning Studies where she researched the growth of institutional investment in Britain's rental sector. Prior to this, Millie studied Architecture and her research interests include housing, urban politics and sustainable transport.

Oriane Nermond

Oriane is a Research Manager at Centre for London. She joined in January 2023 and is responsible for managing research projects on a range of topics. Before joining the team, Oriane worked at the Office for National Statistics leading on inclusivity projects to increase participation of underrepresented groups in UK national surveys. Oriane also previously worked in both private and public sectors in France and in the UK. Oriane has a Master's degree in Urban Policy.

Claire Harding

Claire Harding is Research Director at Centre for London. She joined the Centre in 2020 and is responsible for our research programme. Before joining Centre for London, Claire worked at Coram Family and Childcare. She has previously also worked in mental health and local government consultancy.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to everyone who shared their time and expertise with us throughout this project. In particular, we thank the members of our Advisory Group: Elizabeth Beaumont (Appeals and Enforcement Manager, London Borough of Camden), Tanya Braun (Head of Policy and Communications, Living Streets), John Dale (Director, Urban Movement), Nic Durston (Chief Executive, South Bank BID), Rob Edwards (Lead Sponsor Network Sponsorship, Investment, Delivery Planning, Surface, Transport for London), Robin Hibbert (Director, Company Operations, Heart of London Business Alliance), Alex Jan (Non-Executive Chair, Central District Alliance), Mei-Yee Man Oram (Access and Inclusion Lead, Arup).

In addition, we would like to thank all those who generously gave their time to take part in an interview: Stephanie Dance (Transport Strategy Communications, Engagement and Consultations Lead, London Borough of Camden), David Hunter (Convenor, Living Streets, Edinburgh), Dan Johnson (Strategic Projects Advisor, Heart of London Business Alliance), Svetlana Kotova (Director of Campaigns and Justice, Inclusion London), Peter Loft (Policy Manager, Thames Water), Julie Plichon (Interim Team Leader, Transport projects and people-friendly streets, London Borough of Islington), Anna Rowell (Principal Programme Officer – Streets, Greater London Authority), Lucy Saunders (Director, Healthy Streets), Mark Wilson (street work, London Borough of Islington) and London Heritage Quarter (London HQ).

Thanks also go to our Centre for London colleagues: Klara Blazek (for the design of the report), Jeeshan Choudhury (for support with the street assessments), Josh Cottell (for support with the advisory group and recommendations), Zarin Mahmud (for support with the street assessments), Jon Tabbush (for support with the street assessments), Katie Townsend (for support with the street assessments).

Finally, this project would not have been possible without the support of our principal sponsor Central District Alliance, and our supporting sponsors Heart of London Business Alliance and South Bank BID. Nonetheless, the views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors, and all errors and omissions remain our own.

Foreword

London is in many ways one of the world's most handsome cities. Its skyline is renowned internationally for heritage spires as well as soaring towers. The central London area is home to ancient palaces and pretty townhouses as well as fine hotels and high-end retail. London is adorned with Royal Parks and Georgian squares that offer perhaps the most beautiful and well-maintained green spaces of any major city in the world.

Yet at the same time, as you ascend from one of the often cathedral-like railway stations and cast your eye to the street, too often you will see that parts of the cityscape have an almost Dickensian feel to them – and not in a good way. With the exception of perhaps the City of London, Canary Wharf and our Great Estates, roads and pavements are frequently scarred with an array of abandoned phone boxes, unending piles of commercial refuse, poor utility reinstatements and relentless roadworks. Then there are strewn hire bikes and e-scooters, vast arrays of left-behind traffic signs, “rocking” manhole covers, fly-tipping and overflowing bins. These are not everywhere but they are sufficiently widespread in the centre of London to make walking, pushing a pram or using a wheelchair an unpleasant experience. For residents, commuters and visitors to our city, this can all be so very wearing.

Despite the continuing effort of the boroughs, TfL and indeed business improvement districts such as my own, this combination of street level chaos and detritus provides the perfect backdrop for other forms of anti-social behaviour to take place; reinforcing the perception that many central London streets have become unregulated spaces where anything goes.

That is why this report is so important. It gives voice to the chronic problems that Londoners, workers and visitors to Zone 1 face when they use many of the city's streets. Importantly, it highlights a number of practical steps that could be taken to help alleviate these problems.

At a time of continued pressure on local government finances, the report looks at giving local authorities enhanced powers to bear down on the causes of many of the problems street users encounter. It suggests the increased use of penalties and charges to help provide the resources needed to help clean up the mess. Ideas such as annual charges on the utilities, stronger local powers to jettison phone boxes (surely one of the most egregious examples of corporate irresponsibility we know) and rationalising commercial waste collections are all explored. Better co-ordination, guidance and leadership from the GLA are highlighted. To these we should add encouraging more boroughs to use the existing powers they have - such as punishing the utilities for late completion and shoddy roadworks - perhaps with the same gusto with which authorities bear down on parking and driving misdemeanours.

If we don't get to grips with these problems, central London's streets risk descending further into places of what the leading economist JK Galbraith called “private opulence and public squalor.” At a time when London's private and public sectors are investing in place-making schemes, fighting off competition from other world cities for investment and battling to attract new employment, that would be a disaster.

I think I speak for many business improvement districts and central London residents when I ask government at all levels to take the recommendations in this excellent report seriously.

In the words of Fiorello LaGuardia, a legendary mayor of New York City, “There is no Democratic or Republican way of cleaning the streets.” As I write, New York City is stealing a march on London, rolling out radical plans to containerise street refuse and rationalise private waste collection services.

The time for action by our leaders irrespective of their political allegiances is surely now. Central London residents, visitors, businesses and commuters deserve better. I know our business improvement districts stand ready to join with London and national government to secure safer, cleaner, greener and more welcoming streets for all.

**Alexander Jan, Non-executive Chair,
Central District Alliance and Hatton Garden Business Improvement Districts**

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Summary | <u>7</u> |
| Recommendations | <u>9</u> |
| Introduction | <u>12</u> |
| 1. What causes street clutter and why is it a problem? | <u>15</u> |
| 2. How cluttered is central London? | <u>19</u> |
| 3. What are the challenges to reduce street clutter? | <u>30</u> |
| Appendix | <u>44</u> |
| Endnotes | <u>46</u> |

Summary

Street clutter – defined as poorly placed or redundant objects on the pavement that negatively affect pedestrians or other users – makes London a worse place to live, work and visit.¹ Worse for pedestrians, who have less space to move around, and especially for disabled people, who sometimes find they cannot use the pavement at all. Worse for businesses, who lose out on footfall when streets aren't clean and attractive. And worse for our national and international reputation, if visitors encounter messy or even dangerous pavements when they arrive in our city.

In principle, street clutter could be an easy problem to solve: most of the objects involved are not especially large, and they would be physically easy to remove. But London is held back by complex governance and a lack of clarity about who owns which object on pavements, whether it should be considered as clutter, and if so who should remove it and on what timescale.

In this report, we have considered the objects on London's streets which get in the way of people walking and wheeling: not all of them are clutter all the time, but they can be some of the time. We have focused on central London because this is where the problem is most acute, but many of our recommendations apply to other urban areas as well. We've included phone boxes, bollards, benches, planters, signage, barriers for utility works, advertising 'A boards', rubbish bags, shared bikes and scooters, outdoor dining tables and other fixed or movable objects, but not intrusion from light and sound, flat posters/art/visuals on pavements or walls, or pedicabs and street performance.

In case studies of three London streets, we found a high level of street clutter across the board but significant variation in what the major problems were – this shows the range of challenges that we face, but also that some problems don't exist much on certain streets, demonstrating that some areas already have good strategies in place for dealing with certain types of clutter. The most common objects we found on streets were A boards, e-bikes, rubbish bags and bollards. Some bollards are necessary, and e-bikes can be less of a problem when they are parked well, but we think that London can and should remove A boards and rubbish bags. Some objects, such as bike docks and planters, can sometimes be placed in the roadway instead of the pavement, prioritising pedestrians over parking spaces.

In our recommendations, we set out steps for national government, the GLA, local authorities and business improvement districts to reduce clutter, and get world class pavements for our city.

Street clutter – defined as poorly placed or redundant objects on the pavement that negatively affect pedestrians or other users – makes London a worse place to live, work and visit.

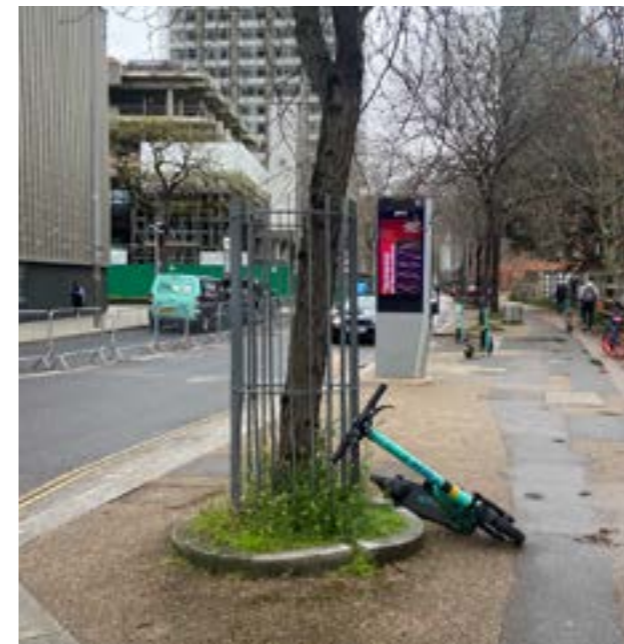
National government, highway authorities (i.e. Transport for London and local authorities), and other organisations such as Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), utility companies, phone and micromobility providers, all have their role to play to ensure London's streets are inclusive, walkable and desirable places to spend time.

All redundant items on the pavement should be removed.

1. The GLA should ban A boards for all businesses in London. See chapter 3 for why the ban needs to be comprehensive. In the meantime, the GLA should work with BIDs to run programmes to educate small businesses on the negative impacts of A boards and to raise awareness of best practice.
2. Phone providers should remove all redundant phone kiosks. See chapter 3 for more details.
3. Local authorities and Transport for London (TfL) should remove redundant signs (e.g. 20mph signs at the intersection of TfL and boroughs roads).

National government should grant local authorities adequate powers and resources to reduce street clutter.

4. National government should grant local authorities powers and resources to deal with street clutter. This could include:
 - Funding local authorities adequately to enable them to carry out street clutter assessments, including the impact on equalities. This could be done by giving local authorities the power to levy charges on street furniture, such as phone kiosks or utility boxes.
 - Giving local authorities the power to remove redundant street furniture, such as redundant phone kiosks, with very limited grounds for appeal, subject to prior notice.



Recommendations

Local authorities and the GLA should develop new strategies and guidance to support the decluttering efforts of highway authorities.

5. Local authorities should develop decluttering strategies, with a focus on how decluttering can be incorporated into their existing street related activities. This could be done by:
 - Raising awareness amongst highway maintenance staff about the negative impacts of street clutter.
 - Establishing a clear process for staff and the public to report potential street clutter.
 - Developing strategy that would encourage street furniture to be placed in the carriageway instead of the pavement where appropriate.
6. The GLA should support local authorities with their decluttering effort by:
 - Providing guidance to create robust policies that will support officers in assessing applications for new phone kiosks.
 - Coordinating the enforcement of private operators who do not maintain their street furniture in multiple boroughs, or do not remove redundant street furniture.
7. National government should grant local authorities and TfL the power to require dockless micromobility vehicles to be parked in dedicated, clearly marked bays. Where possible, these bays should be placed in the carriageway rather than on the pavement.

Key players should work together to reduce street clutter.

8. Local authorities and BIDs should work together to reduce the impact of commercial waste on the street. This could include:
 - Working with commercial waste service providers to align waste collection time on key streets with business closing times.
 - Encouraging businesses on a street to use the same waste providers.
 - Introducing waste consolidation centres so that businesses have alternatives to placing refuse directly on the street.
9. Local authorities and organisations doing street work, including utility companies and contractors, should work to minimise disruptions. See chapter 3 for more details on ways this can be done.

Introduction



Our vision for London's streets

Streets play a vital role for the capital. They are the framework that connects people to the places they want to go, which is critical to supporting London's economic growth. Moreover, many of London's streets are destinations in their own right, attracting visitors from across the UK and the world. They can play a vital role in people's experience of London, serving as spaces for community, activity and culture. Our vision is for London's streets to be inclusive, safe, vibrant and walkable or wheelable for all Londoners. We want London's streets to be spaces that everyone is able to access, in which people want to spend time, and businesses want to be located.

This report focuses on pavement space. Pavements are primarily spaces for pedestrians, but they also have to accommodate a range of other functions. One reason that so many functions are accommodated on pavements is that, compared to driving, people sometimes assume it's easy for pedestrians to move in the face of obstacles. This is despite the fact that pavements are often the narrowest part of the street.

Defining the problem

Central London has a street clutter problem. Pavements have for many years been the default location in the street for plants, lighting, utility boxes, bike parking, outdoor dining, waste, advertising boards... to name just a few. While many of these objects or activities can and do contribute positively to the street environment (for example well located benches are known to encourage older people to walk more)² many are having overall negative impacts. To distinguish, this report considers 'street clutter' as objects that meet the following definition:

Street clutter is poorly placed or redundant objects on the pavement that negatively impact pedestrians or other pavement users.

Street clutter can be permanent street furniture or transient objects such as business waste or bikes. Some objects have been considered out of scope of this project, see the appendix at the end of this report for more details.

Geographical focus

While street clutter is a problem faced across London and the UK, it is an issue most acutely felt on streets with high foot traffic and with multiple, competing uses. For this reason, the project has focussed on streets within the Central Activities Zone of London (CAZ). The CAZ is already subject to supplementary planning guidance to enable the areas within it to balance their strategic functions and this provides a good policy backdrop from which to make recommendations. However, many of the recommendations are transferable to other parts of London or indeed other city centres struggling with street clutter.

GLOSSARY

Some of the terms appearing in this report are used in different ways across the literature. The following shows how we define them for the purposes of this research:

Highway authorities

In this report, we use this term to refer to both Transport for London (TfL) and borough highway teams.

Work promoters

In this report, we define work promoters as anyone delivering street works. This includes utility companies and contractors delivering works on behalf of highway authorities.

Redundant

This can be defined as any objects which don't add any value to a street. This comprises objects that are no longer in use or are not used as intended.

Business Improvement Districts (BID)

BIDs are organisations representing businesses in a specific area. They are funded by a mandatory levy paid by businesses.

Central Activities Zone (CAZ)

In this report, we considered all the spaces comprised within the CAZ boundaries as defined in the London Plan. The CAZ covers parts of ten central London boroughs.



Chapter 1

What causes street clutter, and why is it a problem?



“it is a problem and especially in crowded central London areas where the space for moving is already quite small. It becomes even smaller then, and when you already find it difficult anyway, it just becomes much harder”

Disability rights advocate

“with people in wheelchairs, you need the drop kerb to get off the pavement and if say for example, there are bags with rubbish blocking the pavement, literally the only thing you can do go is back and then find a different street to go to because what do you do? You can't just suddenly go on the road, you just can't do it. It won't be possible.”

Disability rights advocate

Impact of street clutter

While everyone using London's streets can be negatively impacted by street clutter, from residents and workers to tourists and businesses, for some groups these impacts are greater than others. The following section outlines the different kinds of negative impacts that street clutter can have and how they impact different groups.

Accessibility

Accessible streets need sufficient clear footway. The term 'clear footway' refers to the amount of unobstructed pavement, not the full pavement width, and there is some debate about how much is needed. The Department of Transport's Inclusive Mobility Guidance advises that under normal circumstances a minimum of 2m should be provided, with an absolute minimum of 1m (for no more than a 6m length of pavement) where physical constraints and other obstacles are unavoidable.³ Meanwhile Transport for London advocate the use of 'Pedestrian Comfort' levels to assess the spatial needs of a pavement according to factors such as the area type and pedestrian flow. Total pavement widths recommended in their guidance vary from 2m on low flow streets, to 5.3m on high flow streets.⁴

Ultimately, any object placed in the pavement reduces the amount of clear pavement width for pedestrians to use. This is particularly a problem for people using wheelchairs who need more space. When people using wheelchairs encounter a space too narrow to get past, they typically have to return to the last dropped kerb in order to cross to the other side, which can significantly disrupt their journeys. Wheelchair users are not the only people who need more space; families with buggies and people using mobility scooters can also encounter these problems. Moreover, when guide dogs cannot detect a wide enough space on a street they will simply stop.⁵

The negative impacts associated with reducing the width of clear footway can be mitigated through sensible placement of street furniture. Street furniture is typically placed in a 'zone' between the footway and the carriageway. On new schemes this is usually done well, and can also help to create a useful barrier between pedestrians and cars. However, on many of London's narrower streets there is still a legacy of poorly placed street furniture. Moreover, transient objects such as A boards or business waste are more likely to impede on clear pavement widths as the pavement is not designed to accommodate them.

Reduced width is not the only way that street clutter affects accessibility. A survey from the RNIB found that 95 per cent of blind and partially sighted people had collided with an obstacle in their local neighbourhood over a 3 month period, of which 1 in 3 were injured.⁶ Transient clutter causes particular issues for people with visual impairments as it can disrupt their memorised 'map' of their environment that many use to navigate.

Safety

Street clutter can also create safety hazards. When street clutter reduces the clear footway it can encourage pedestrians to step into the highway to get around it, particularly when streets are busy, increasing the likelihood of a road accident. Moreover, if objects are too close to the kerb in places where pedestrians are making informal road crossings then it can inhibit their ability to get back onto the pavement. Low lying street clutter can also create trip hazards, and when objects in the street are in disrepair they can pose further danger.

“[Street clutter] often impacts on people’s reading of the street and therefore legibility and wayfinding. And I think that also can cover people who are used to an area, but more so those who are new to an area, tourists, new residents, new workers.”

BID representative

“Where an environment has a high amount of clutter, it would be recalled less favourably than an area that isn’t. And then that in turn harms potential investment growth”

BID representative

Navigability

Objects in the street can either improve, or worsen, people’s ability to navigate. Well designed and located signage, such as TfL’s Legible London signs, can be important visual cues and positively contribute to the street scene. However, too much signage can be confusing and make streets harder to understand. Moreover, inappropriately sized or poorly located objects on the pavement can obscure key sight lines.

Desirability

Street clutter can substantially reduce the enjoyable experience of the public realm and therefore discourage walking. Studies have shown that street clutter and neglected streets can have a negative impact on the desirability of walking in an area.² This is supported by a 2021 survey by the Department for Transport which found that 74 per cent of people surveyed in England say that ‘well-maintained pavements (even, clean, uncluttered, well-lit)’ would encourage them to walk more.³ This not only has consequences for active travel, but also for businesses that rely on people wanting to visit the area.

Drivers of street clutter

In this section, we review the factors contributing to the increasing the level of street clutter in London.

Lack of pavement space

One underpinning factor driving street clutter is lack of pavement space. In our case studies, we found that while some objects were well-maintained and positively contributed to the public space, they were cluttering the area because of the accumulation of other objects on the pavement.

Cluttered pavements are intrinsically linked to how streets have been designed as well as the allocation and management of street space. While the way people travel is changing, many streets still have lots of space allocated for car parking. As a result, pavement space often become crowded with many objects that could be positioned elsewhere. Some London boroughs have introduced strategies to encourage objects to be placed on the kerbside rather than on the pavement, such as Lambeth council. In 2023, the borough published a strategy to rebalance priorities for Lambeth streets. For example, they are committed to planting trees on the kerbside to create clearer pavements.²

Using the kerbside to locate cycle racks, trees, micromobility parking bays, refuse collection facilities or electric vehicle charging points is a way to reduce the number of objects on the pavement.

Overprovision of street furniture

Some pieces of street furniture were installed with good intentions, such as improving people’s safety or helping them navigate streets. But it turns out that they are in fact having a negative impact on pedestrians’ experiences.

Guardrails are perfect examples of street furniture being installed to improve pedestrians’ safety, by preventing them from crossing roads and walking on the carriageway. But, after two decades of debate, there is a growing consensus amongst policymakers, urban planners, designers and local authorities that guard railings don’t make pedestrians safer. In 2003, a study commissioned by TfL found that there wasn’t a clear rationale for having guardrails in London.¹⁰ Organisations such as Living Streets campaigned for their removal as guardrails take pedestrians away from their “desire line”.¹¹ This culminated in 2011 with a large programme launched by TfL to remove most of its guardrails from its road networks.¹² Local authorities carried out similar works, and many streets redesigned projects included the removal of guardrails.

“But there’s sort of this sense that sometimes things get put in just to be on the safe side.”

Local authority officer

“I guess it is just that streets are used in a very different way now”

Disability rights advocate

Bollards are another street furniture which have reportedly been overprovided on London streets. They are often overused as an ‘easy’ or cheap design solution for preventing vehicles from encroaching on pedestrian areas, as opposed to being the least cluttering solution.¹³

Similarly to bollards, street signs are sometimes overprovided: the reasons for this are explored in chapter 3.

Legislation and regulations

Regulations and legislation are other drivers of street clutter. We heard from our interviewees that some of the regulations around signage or bollards could be reviewed to reduce the number of items on the pavement.

For example, one interviewee explained that some motorcyclists drive on the pavement to avoid Low-Traffic Neighbourhoods’ camera enforcement. This behaviour can be discouraged by either installing bollards on pavements or by enforcing with cameras. However, local authorities are required to inform people of the camera enforcement by adding additional signage. In both cases, the enforcement would result in creating additional clutter on the street.

Legacy and maintenance

Other items on the pavement are just left there without being maintained or used.

When redesigning a street, boroughs remove redundant street furniture. However, few boroughs have processes in place to declutter their streets routinely. This means redundant objects are left on pavements for a long period of time before being removed, such as redundant signs or unused phone boxes or mailboxes when these items are not listed. Furthermore, some objects are not maintained which means that they will fall into disrepair. See chapter 2 for a spotlight on disrepair.

New uses of the street

The use of the pavement is also changing with the increased use of dockless micromobility, outdoor dining, and electric vehicles. In future there will also be other uses that we don’t know yet about.

New usage of the streets also contributes to an increased number of objects and furniture on the pavement (e.g., micro-mobility vehicles, electric vehicles etc.).¹⁴

Chapter 2

How cluttered is central London?

In this section, we share the findings of our street assessments. For more details on the methodology, see the appendix.

Headline findings

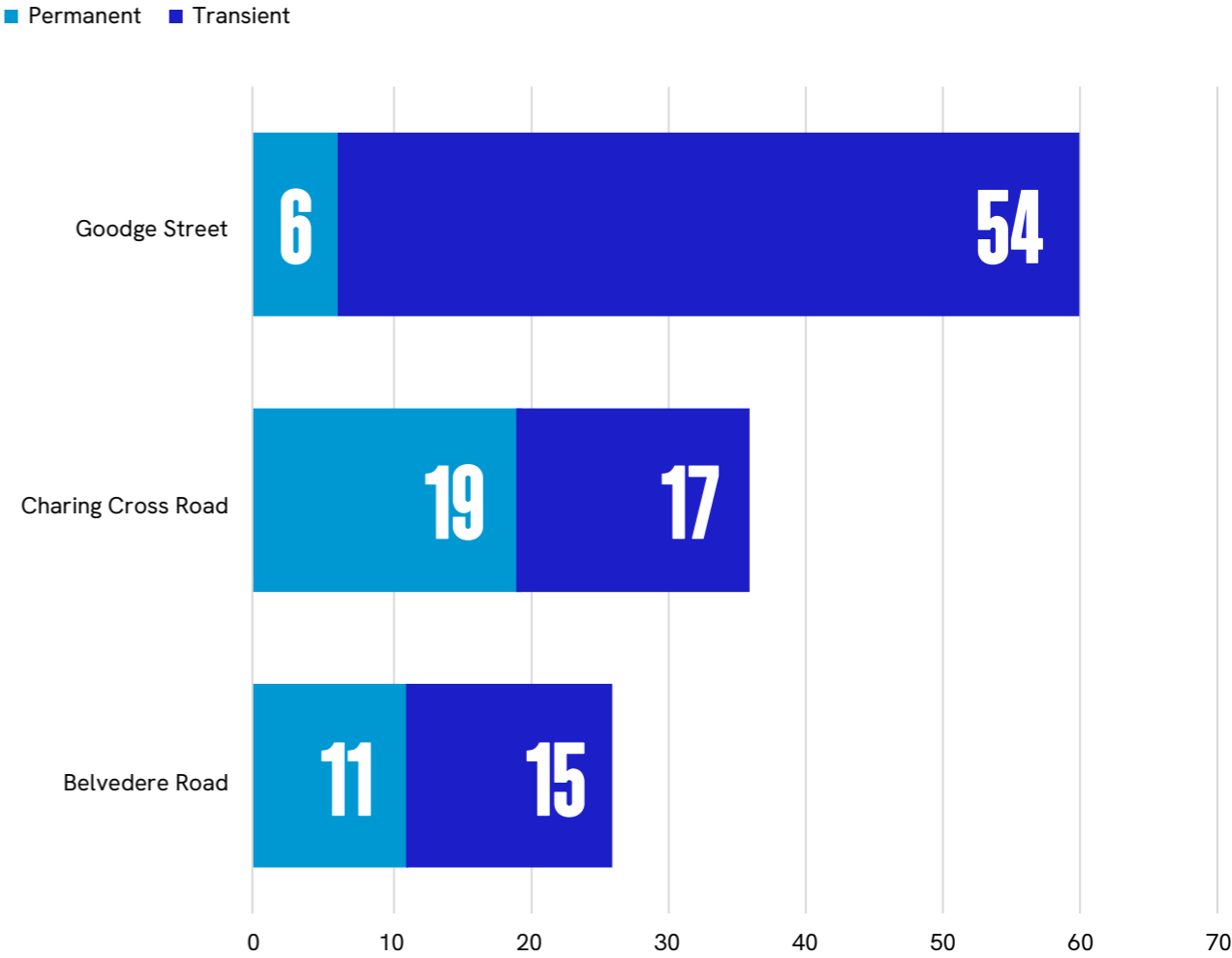
Our street assessments found over 120 items of clutter. Of the three streets assessed, Goodge Street W1 was the most cluttered, followed by Charing Cross Road WC2 then Belvedere Road SE1. Most of the clutter identified was transient, i.e. not permanently fixed in place. This included objects such as A boards, e-bikes, rubbish bags and construction hoardings. But the ratio of permanent to transient clutter varied on each street. Goodge Street is much more affected by transient clutter than permanent. Approximately half of the street clutter was identified as having moderate or severe negative impacts. This means that the negative impacts of the items substantially outweighed the positive, and action was deemed necessary.

The drivers of street clutter varied substantially across the three streets we assessed, and the following section explores this in more detail.



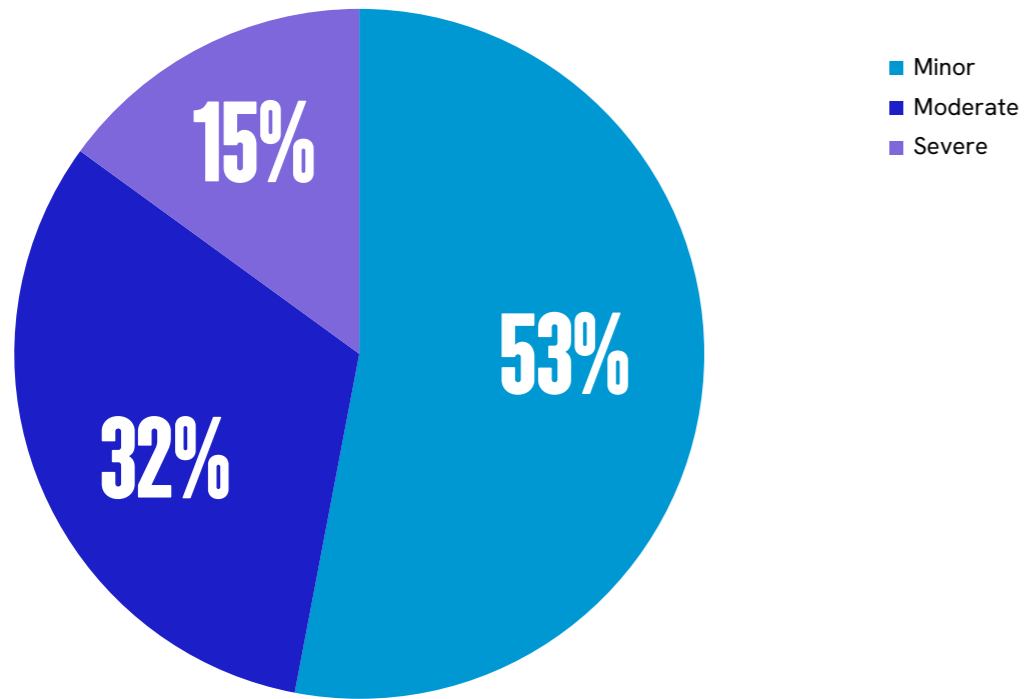
122 items of clutter across three streets

Figure 1: Number of items of clutter identified on each street, over 400m.



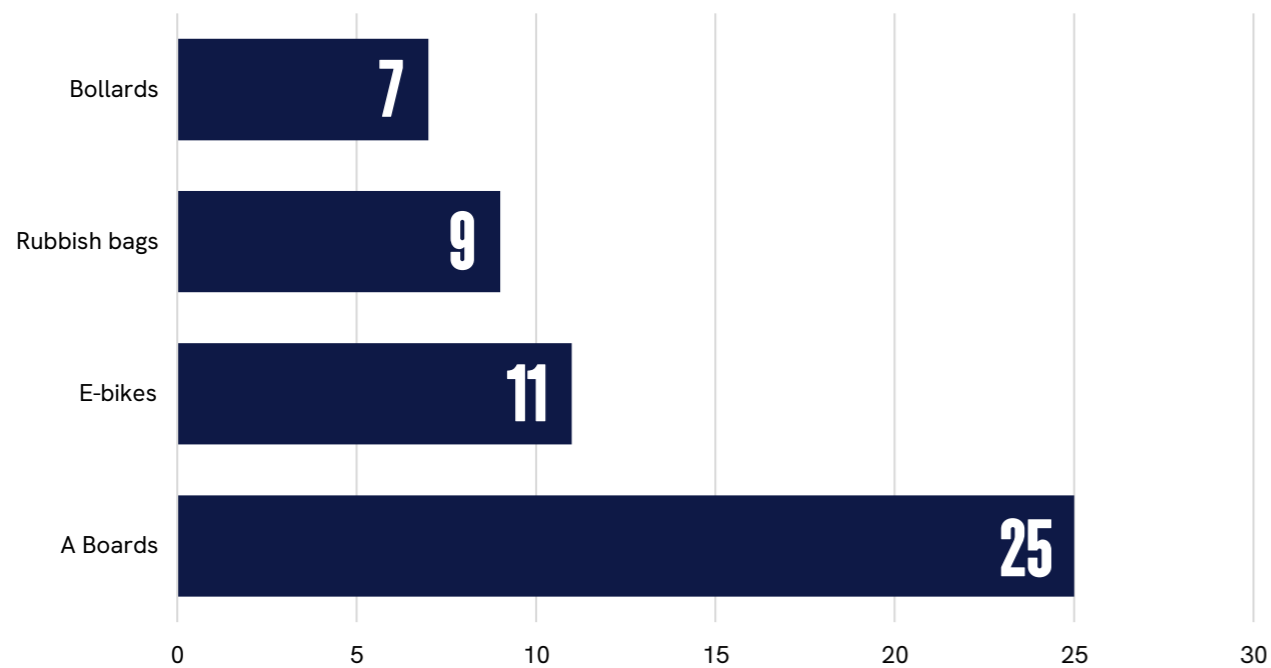
Approximately half of the street clutter is having moderate or severe negative impacts on pavement users.

Figure 2: Severity of clutter, as a proportion of total.



A boards were the most common form of street clutter

Figure 3: Most common types of street clutter observed in the assessments, over 400m.



Source: Centre For London (2023) Street Assessments

Belvedere Road SE1

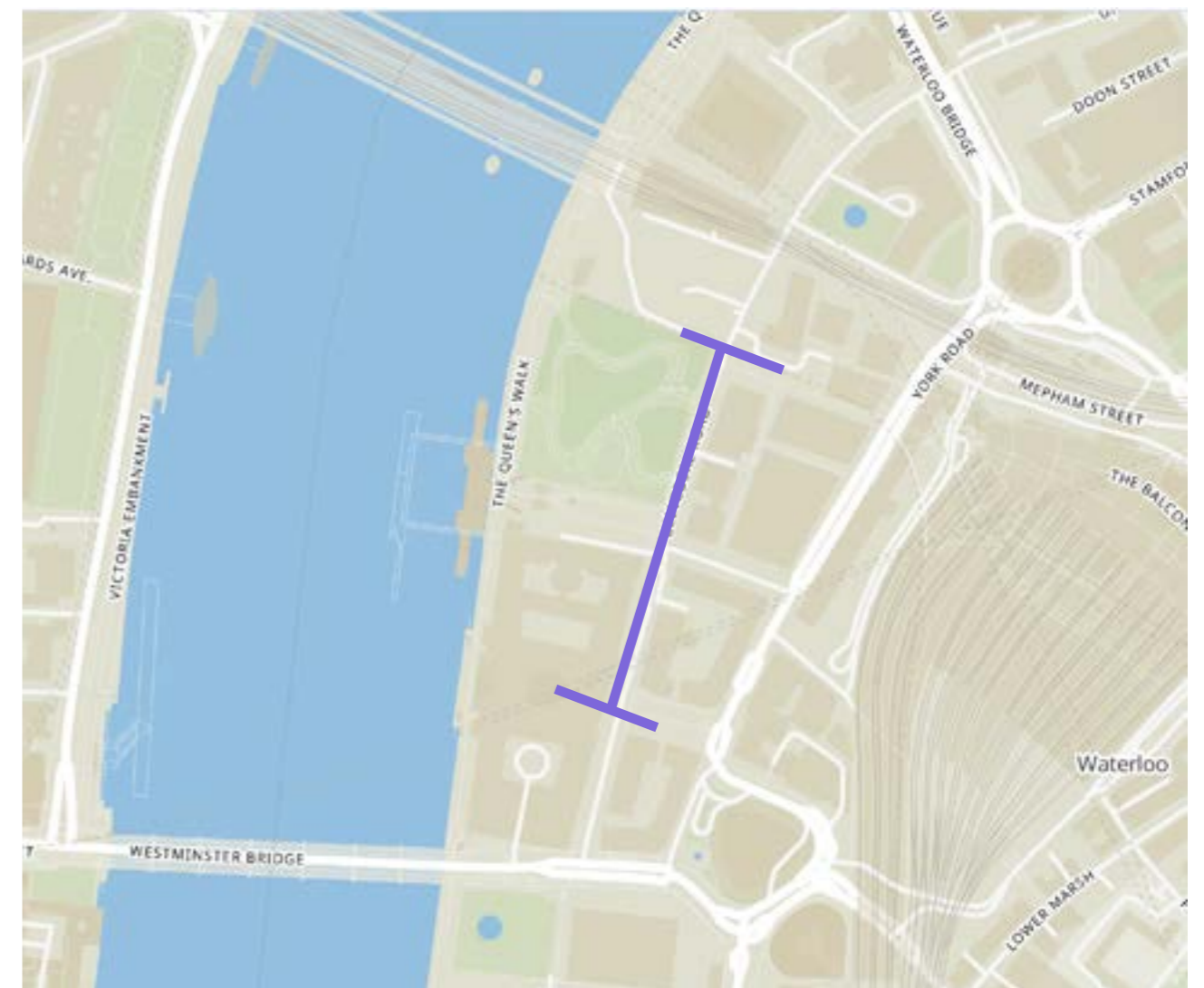
Context

Belvedere Road, in Southwark, runs behind the pedestrianised South Bank. Although it predominately services the cultural assets on the South Bank, the road also has cafes, restaurants, hotels and offices.

Belvedere Road is privately owned at the southern end, nearest Westminster Bridge, and at the time of the assessment the road was closed at the northern end due to construction works. While this means there was no through traffic, there were nonetheless plenty of vehicles on the street, many of which were taxis or private hire vehicles.

Parts of Belvedere Road have high levels of pedestrian footfall, especially at the intersection with Chicheley Street which connects the London Eye to Waterloo station. The pavement width varied, with some stretches less than the DfT’s recommended 2m minimum.

Figure 4: Map of Belvedere Road



© MapTiler © OpenStreetMap

How cluttered is this street?

The 400m section of Belvedere Road that we assessed had more than 50 bollards on it. Many of which were required to mitigate terrorist threats.¹⁵ Despite this, we still identified that in several instances, there was an overprovision of bollards which were having a negative impact on the street and 14 should be removed.

Because the bollards were grouped together, we classified each group as one 'object' so as not to distort the data. We found that:

- 31 per cent of the objects on Belvedere Road were street clutter.
- The majority (58 per cent) of the clutter was transient.
- 50 per cent of the clutter was classed as 'severe'.

After bollards, the most common kinds of clutter on Belvedere Road were:

- Construction and roadworks boards or signs
- A boards
- Parked cars

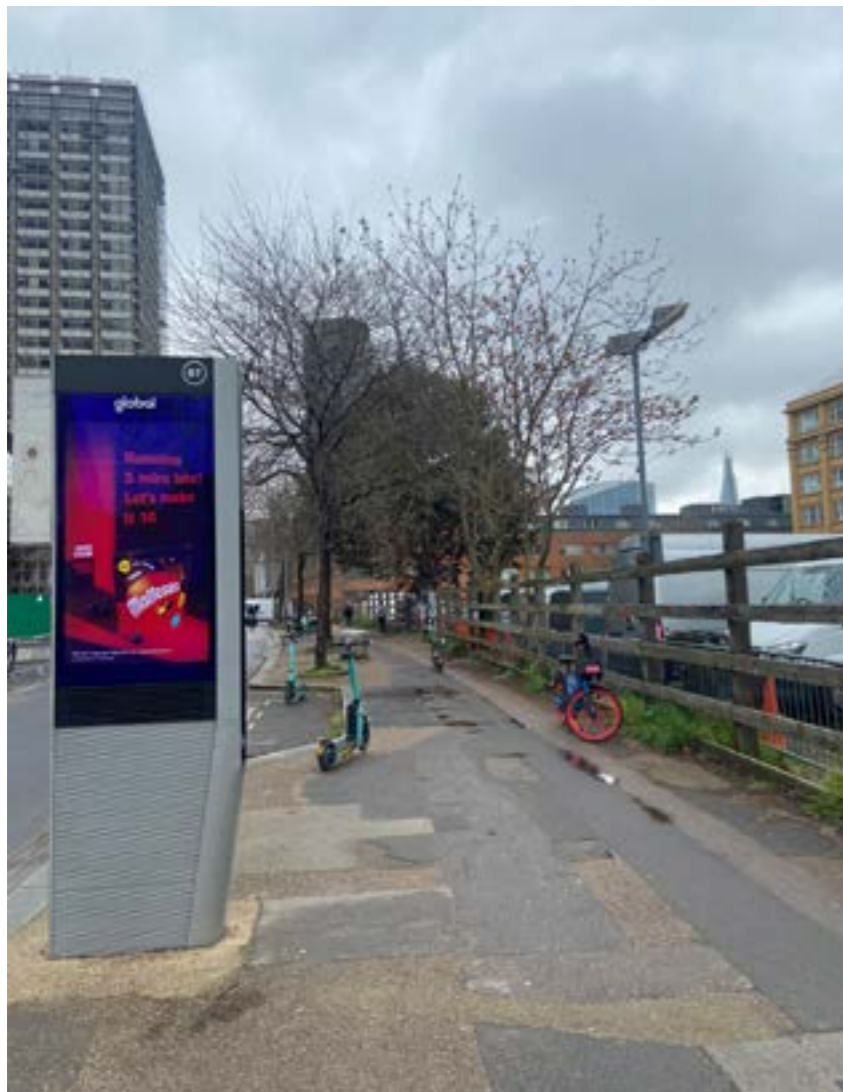


Figure 5: Dockless micromobility parked on pavement instead of in designated bay

What is driving the problem?

On Belvedere Road, we often observed a compounding effect where multiple objects on the street were interacting with each other, increasing the negative impacts. For example, where construction hoardings had taken up large sections of the pavement, there were often permanent fixtures such as signage poles and bollards which all substantially decreased the clear pavement width.

Moreover, the northern end of Belvedere Road that we assessed had no raised kerbs which meant that many cars had parked illegally on the pavement, not in the marked bays (see Figure 5 for example). This meant that not only did pedestrians have reduced pavement space due to the construction works and associated signage, but they then have to navigate around parked vehicles (which may start moving – creating a serious safety concern).

Spotlight on disrepair

Situated by Jubilee gardens on Belvedere Road is the cash machine in Figure 3, which also has phone functions on the rear side. The cash machine is well placed on a wide section of pavement, and so its location is not having negative impacts on accessibility or walkability.

However, it is covered in graffiti including on the screen of the cash machine, rendering it unusable. This is an example of where the condition of disrepair is driving the issue of street clutter.

This object is owned by a private company which is responsible for the maintenance, not the local authority. The local authority has limited powers to remove the object or to enforce its maintenance (see chapter 3 for more details on the governance of these kinds of objects).

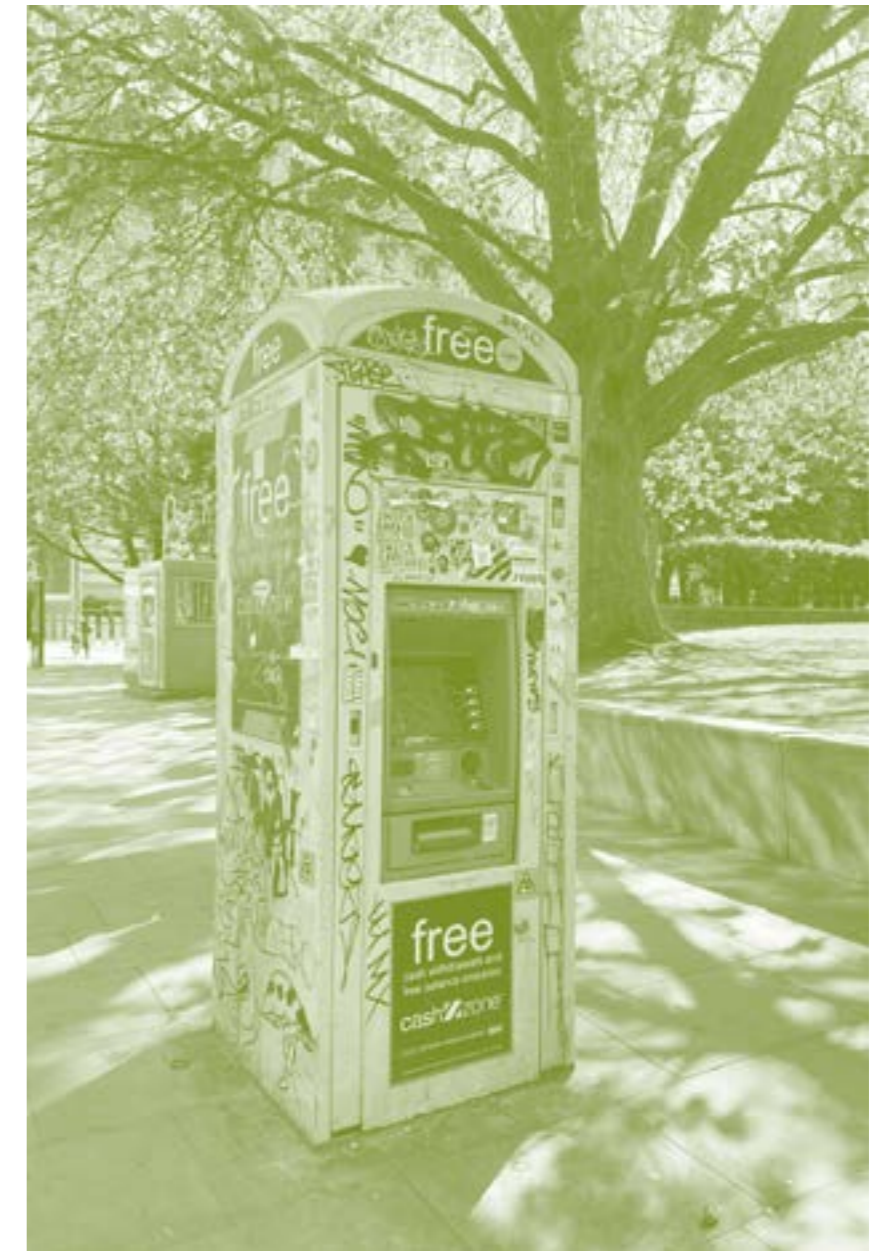


Figure 6: Graffitied cash machine

Goodge Street W1

Context

Goodge Street, which runs between Westminster and Camden and therefore forms part of a borough boundary, is a popular street for shopping and dining in Fitzrovia. The majority of restaurants and pubs have outdoor dining on the pavements, an ongoing legacy of the pandemic.

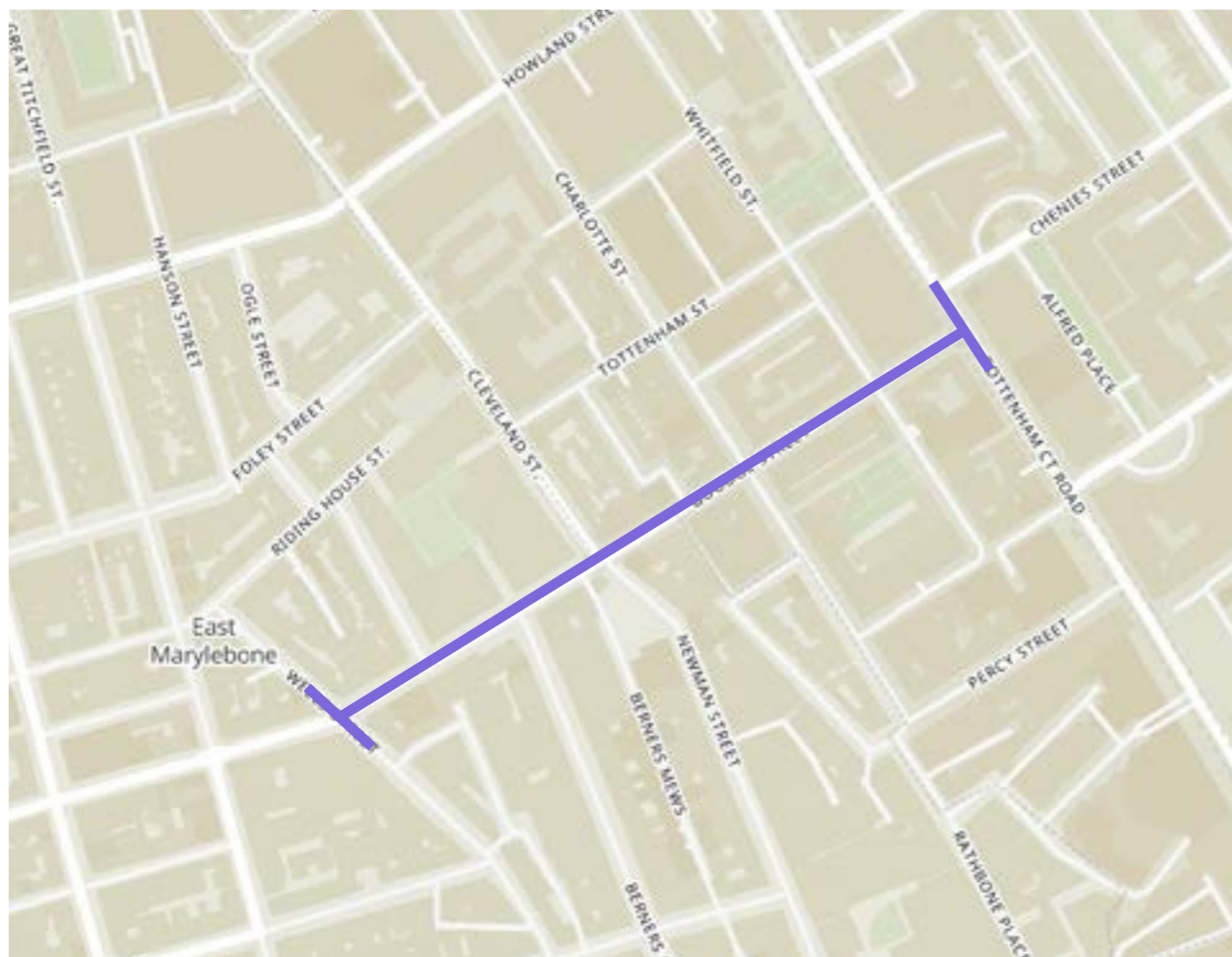
The eastern end of the street is single direction, one-lane traffic, but it widens on the intersection with Charlotte Street into two lanes. There are very high levels of pedestrian footfall and the footway is mostly over 2m wide.

How cluttered is this street?

On the 400m stretch of Goodge Street that was assessed, we found that:

- 49 per cent of the objects on the street were clutter.
- The vast majority (89 per cent) of the clutter was transient.
- 33 per cent of the clutter was classed as 'moderate', 15 per cent was classed as 'severe'

Figure 7: Map of Goodge Street



The most common kinds of clutter on Goodge Street were:

- A boards
- Commercial refuse
- Outdoor seating
- Traffic cones

What is driving the problem?

On Goodge Street, we found 18 A boards that could be classed as clutter. This is driven by the high density of shops and restaurants, each competing with one another for customers. Moreover, we observed that several businesses had multiple A boards. The A boards varied in size and were often found clustered together (see Figure 8). Along with reducing the accessibility of the footway, A boards can cause serious risks to people with visual impairments and make it harder to navigate through the street.



Figure 8: Abundance of A boards on Goodge Street

Commercial waste was also identified as causing negative impacts for pedestrians and other pavement users on Goodge Street. Like much of central London, Goodge Street doesn't have dedicated infrastructure for collecting commercial waste. As a result, accepted practice is that waste is placed in the street for collection. These bags were found to take up large areas of the pavement, reducing the accessibility of the street, and also reducing the desirability of walking in this area. The impacts of and solutions to A boards and commercial waste are discussed further in chapter 3.



Figure 9: Commercial waste beneath a broken sign

Charing Cross Road WC2

Context

The northern end of Charing Cross Road runs along the Westminster/Camden boundary. We assessed the southern most part of the road which is situated only in Westminster. Charing Cross Road sits right in the heart of central London, neighbouring key tourist destinations such as Leicester Square and Chinatown and leads to Trafalgar Square. The road is also home to theatres, restaurants and other commercial premises.

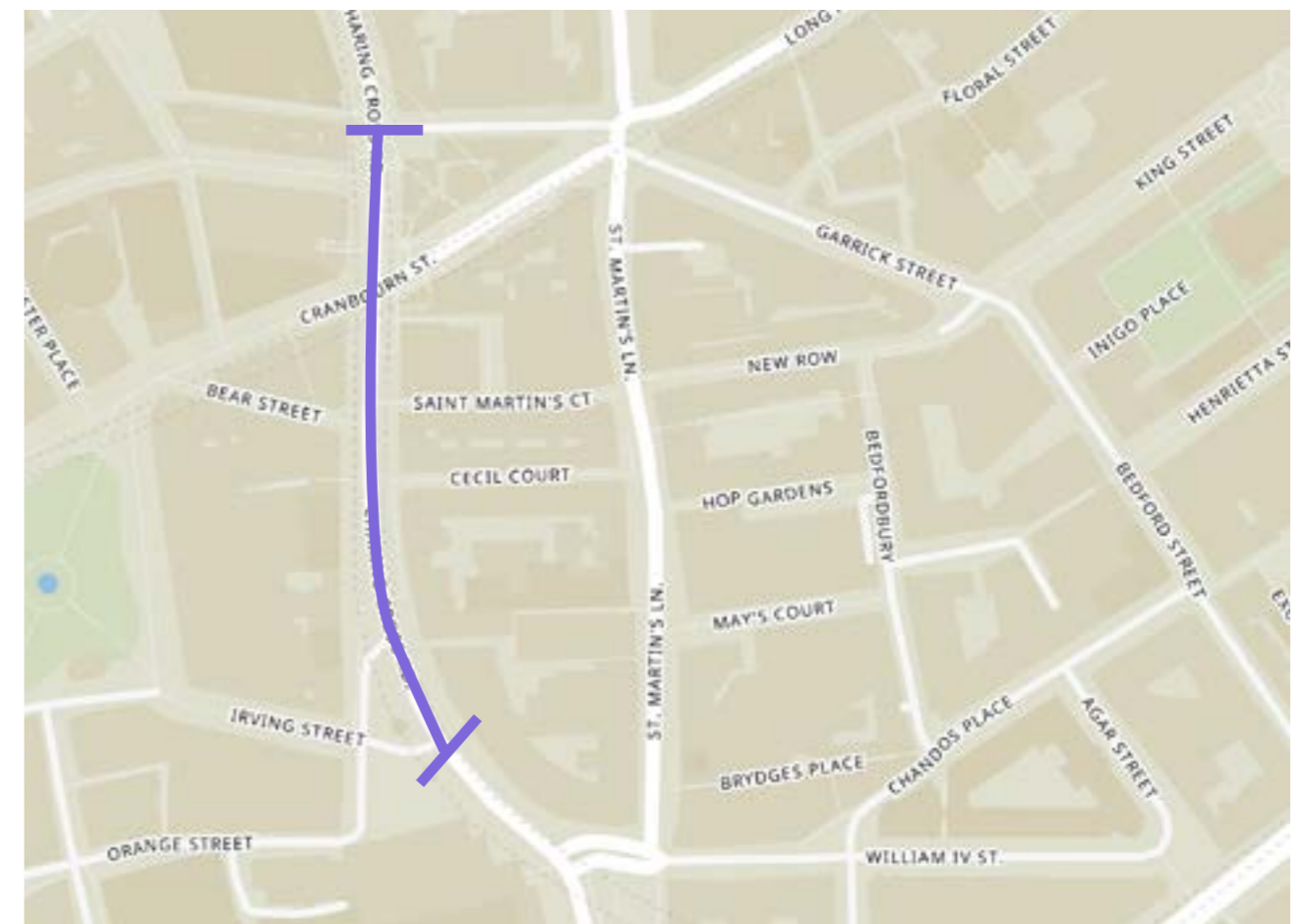
Charing Cross Road has very high movement functions for both pedestrians and vehicles. On the section we assessed, pavement widths did not drop below 2m. However, given the very high levels of pedestrian footfall, the minimum width for comfort following TfL's guidance would be much greater.

How cluttered is this street?

On the 400m stretch of Charing Cross Road that was assessed, we found that:

- 38 per cent of the objects on the street were clutter.
- Around half of the clutter (46 per cent) was transient.
- 39 per cent of the clutter was classed as 'moderate', 6 per cent was classed as 'severe'

Figure 10: Map of Charing Cross Road



The most common kinds of clutter on Charing Cross Road were:

- Dockless e-bikes
- Signage
- A boards

What is driving the problem?

On Charing Cross Road, we found that dockless e-bikes were the primary source of clutter. It should be noted that during the assessments not all dockless e-bikes were classified as clutter, only those that were found to be having negative impacts on pedestrians and other pavement users. The main reason for this was the location of the bikes on the streets, especially if other objects were already restricting free pavement width. As a key arterial road with high movement functions, it is unsurprising that more e-bikes were found on this road than the other two case studies.

At the time of the assessment, there were construction works taking place over the northern section of the assessment area. The hoardings and scaffolding had significant impact on the accessible pavement width. Similar to Belvedere Road, this issue was made worse when there were permanent objects also in the pavement.



Figure 11: Dockless e-bikes on Charing Cross Road

Chapter 3

What are the challenges to reduce street clutter?

Central London's streets are cluttered and street clutter poses considerable problems for residents, tourists and businesses. In this chapter, we explore the challenges to reducing street clutter, starting with knowing who is responsible for dealing with it. We then consider the challenges to carrying out decluttering work in general, and for specific objects.

Ownership and governance of street clutter

One of the biggest barriers to reducing street clutter is that it is often not clear whose responsibility it is, and who has the right to make changes. In London, local authorities are responsible for most streets, but Transport for London (TfL) are responsible for the strategic road network (A-roads). Local authority boundaries often fall on busy streets, with one authority responsible for each side: in interviews, we heard that these roads are sometimes less well maintained than roads which fall into a single authority. In addition, some of the spaces that Londoners use for shopping and leisure are privately owned, and subject to decisions (or, sometimes, a lack of decisions) by the landowner: this applies to both some large commercial developments, and smaller spaces in front of or next to shops (known as forecourts).¹⁶ While to the public these spaces may appear to be part of the highway, the local authority has limited control over objects placed in public-private spaces.



“The other thing that we tend to deal with a lot in designing schemes is how to take the clutter out. Who owns it, can we remove it, how expensive it is to remove. And it's a very timely and complex part of a scheme design. I know the difficulties of even just identifying one utilities box and it's taken nearly two years to identify the ownership of that”

BID representative

Some objects on the pavement are owned by TfL, local authorities and private landowners - for example road signs, TfL docked bikes, and many benches and planters. These are relatively straightforward to deal with if there is a problem, although this can take time depending on time and resource constraints. However, a lot of objects on the pavement are not owned by the landowner or one of their close partners. This includes street café tables, A boards, hired e-bikes and e-scooters not owned by TfL, phone boxes and stand alone cash points, on-street adverts (including digital screens), and signs and barriers operated by work promoters (see below for more details on the specific issues related to utility, maintenance works, and on e-bikes). We heard in interviews that it can sometimes be difficult and time consuming to find out who owns a particular piece of clutter in order to ask the owner to remove it, when the gain from removing each individual object is small - in some cases, this leads to redundant objects being left on the street for years.

Local residents and businesses are often interested in reducing street clutter in order to provide a cleaner, more accessible and more attractive environment. In London, BIDs (business improvement districts) are also typically involved in efforts to reduce street clutter, in particular through coordinating commercial waste collection to minimise bags of rubbish being left on the pavement, coordinating street furniture so it is placed to avoid disrupting walking and wheeling, and working with local authorities to identify redundant objects. Neighbourhood forums and communities may also be involved in discussions with local authorities and other landowners about reducing street clutter, often as part of consultations around a wider scheme of change.¹⁷ It seems likely, however, that most members of the public who are affected by street clutter do not report it or raise a complaint.

Digital mapping in local authorities

Most local authorities already use digital mapping software to store data, such as planning records and traffic orders. Many of these databases are internal, but some are set up to be accessible by the public.

‘Fix my street’ is an app used by many local authorities to allow residents to report issues such as fly tipping, broken signage and graffiti. Through apps like this, residents can record issues with a precise location and attach images, which are instantly accessible by the local authority. The local authority then prioritises what to resolve; in interviews, we heard that fixing broken objects is a greater priority, and so more likely to be resolved, as opposed to removing redundant objects.

But how else could these kinds of tools be used? Local authorities could also use digital mapping to record information about objects placed in the street, such as utilities boxes and planters. This would help increase clarity about who owns items on the street, speeding up decluttering work such as removal or maintenance.

Carrying out decluttering works

In interviews, we heard that decluttering typically happens as a by-product of bigger public realm or transport schemes. These might be carried out by a local authority or TfL on their own, such as Islington council’s People Friendly Streets programme, or through partnerships with other stakeholders, such as Camden Council’s West End Project (a collaboration with the Westminster council, TfL, Crossrail, and several BIDs). It is much rarer for decluttering to occur as a standalone practice. This is partly because local authorities don’t have the adequate power to remove redundant items from the streets. And when local authorities do have the power, they don’t always have the resources to use them.

Many local authorities use accessibility audits (typically through external consultants) to understand the clutter existing on streets that they are planning to work on, or to review street schemes they have temporarily installed or trialled. However, these audits can sometimes be seen as a ‘nice to have’ as opposed to a standard on all schemes and cost can be a barrier to this happening more often.

Cost is also cited as a barrier to carrying out decluttering. Although removing individual objects may not be expensive, costs can quickly accumulate across multiple streets. Unless part of a partnership scheme, decluttering is usually self-funded by the local authority and so may not be seen as a high priority when compared to funding other services.

“So one of the key aims [of the West End Project] was about improving the area for pedestrians... There's no point in widening pavement space if there's clutter everywhere.”

Local authority officer

“There is obviously a cost to [accessibility audits] and I think I would argue they're probably useful for every scheme, but, I guess it depends perhaps on the budget of the scheme.”

Local authority officer

“We just generally think there needs to be an assessment of how this will impact on disabled people. ... I mean there is a duty to do that but obviously sometimes it's so done so superficially that yeah, you don't really consider possible negative impacts. They just consider positive.”

Disability rights advocate

“But even the Accessible Street audits, if we wanted to fix all of the impassable obstacles within a Low-Traffic Neighbourhoods for instance like that in one go, we would really explode our budget by 10 times. So, it's really the financial environment preventing us from doing more and we have to be very strategic and work very closely with communities as well to identify priorities. We unfortunately can't do everything.”

Local authority officer

BIDs can also play a role by organising initiatives that engage businesses and residents with decluttering their local streets. This might look like:

- Working with local businesses and their employees to raise awareness about the negative impacts of street clutter and best practice for street furniture and business refuse.
 - Working with local authorities to organise street clean up days where local businesses and residents are supported to volunteer with street maintenance activities such as cleaning street furniture and litter picking.
 - Funding street clutter assessments.
 - Raising awareness and promoting best practice to reduce street clutters.
-

“It worked for us because it was a time when we could, because the contracts were up for renewal. I think it would be harder if you were further into one like we were before, and you don’t have much power to do anything.”

Local authority officer

Dockless micromobility

Over the last few years, dockless micromobility has become increasingly popular across London. This is good news for active travel and so should continue to be encouraged. But it has raised challenges for street space. Bikes and e-scooters are fairly bulky, their location can be unpredictable, and they often come in groups (either by the operator placing them, or by people parking them at popular destinations). The National Federation of the Blind of the UK have stated that ‘dumped’ e-bikes are discouraging people with visual impairments from visiting central London.¹⁸ Furthermore, during our street assessments we found that dockless e-bikes were the second most common form of street clutter. The primary issue is bikes that are poorly located, either on streets that are too narrow or because they are placed perpendicular to the road; this is made worse when they have been knocked over or taken by users who have used them without paying.

The e-scooter trial, which is overseen by TfL, requires e-scooters to be parked in dedicated bays. The bays are typically indicated by road markings on wider areas of pavement, and some are placed off the pavement in converted parking bays. In this way, the impact of compliantly parked e-scooters on pavement accessibility is reduced. By comparison, the governance and regulation of dockless bikes varies by borough, with some requiring dedicated bays and others not. The variable rules for parking can make it difficult for riders to understand and is likely leading to lower levels of compliance. While many local authorities see the need for tighter regulation, this can only be introduced when contracts with the operators are up for renewal, unless new legislation is introduced.

While dedicated parking areas go some way to reducing the negative impacts of dockless micromobility, there is still more that can be done. In our report ‘Micromobility in London’, we described ways that operators have trialled more accessible parking design. This included information on a partnership between Voi and RNIB in which they co-created parking racks that enabled visually impaired road users who utilise walking canes to detect parked e-scooters more easily.¹⁹

Temporary works and utilities

Street works and road works contribute to street clutter as works signs and debris are often placed on pavements. It’s hard to measure the impact of roadworks on pedestrians and street users, but in our case studies we found that traffic cones were one of the most common kinds of clutter on Goodge Street. Furthermore, construction hoardings or signs were the most prevalent kinds of clutter on Belvedere Road.

Utility companies’ apparatus are often placed underground, which means they regularly need to dig up a street to fix their apparatus and they have a statutory right to do. In 2022-23, it was estimated that on average 11,568 utility openings took place in each borough, a total of 381,744 in London,²⁰ an increase of nearly 27 per cent on the previous year.²¹

While in most of the case street works need to happen, there are ways for work promoters to minimise the disruption they cause. This includes:

- Reducing the duration of the works
- Closing only required parts of the streets
- Prioritising maintaining accessible pavements

There are already a number of legislative and enforcement mechanisms in place designed to reduce the negative impacts of street works on pedestrians and other road users. For example, the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, which is the primary legislation on street works, specifies how work promoters can minimise the disruption caused by their works. Local authorities can also inspect utility works to ensure road work compliance with the rules and legislation. Section 74 of the Act allows highway authorities to charge up to £5,000 a day for delayed street works.²² However, there is mixed evidence regarding the effectiveness of these fines as it has been reported that some companies overstate the duration of street works.²³ Interviewees also mentioned that local authorities wouldn’t fine utility companies for things such as leaving traffic cones on the pavements after they left.

In 2012, TfL introduced a Lane Rental Scheme (TLRS) on their road networks to encourage street works to be undertaken overnight, during off-peak time, and at weekends. Despite the successes of the scheme in reducing disruption, we heard in interviews that encouraging works overnight or in weekends on borough roads would be more disruptive than during the week because borough roads are used for other purposes than TfL roads, meaning they are more frequently used on weekends. In our interviews we also heard that as utility companies are allowed to pass on the additional charges on to their customers, it’s likely to provide little incentive to carry out street works at the allocated time. This is something that was also found when a lane rental scheme was introduced in Halcrow in 2003.²⁴ But variations of the TLRS could be introduced on borough roads based on local areas specificity. The GLA is also trying to encourage the use of the ‘dig it once’ approach to minimise disruption caused by road works, but there are many challenges for it to be implemented effectively.

'Dig it once' approach

The 'dig it once' approach consists of bringing together work promoters and highway authorities to coordinate streets works in order to reduce costs and minimise disruption caused by street works.²⁵

In 2018, the London Borough of Croydon created the Croydon Infrastructure Coordination Pilot (CICP) in 2018. This initiative was funded by TfL's Lane Rental scheme and aimed at testing this approach. The pilot was regarded as successful by work promoters, local authorities and residents as it led to fewer days of disruption, improved infrastructure, and significant saving for work promoters.²⁶ Subsequently, in 2019, the GLA set up an Infrastructure Coordination service to support local authorities and work promoters with their dig it once approach.

There isn't a single 'dig it once' approach. Instead there are many ways to carry out collaborative street works with varying levels of coordination, ranging from coordinating the dates/times that work promoters carry out the street works to a complete collaboration where all street works are planned in advance.²⁷ While the former level of coordination is less ambitious, it is easier for local authorities to implement compared to the latter. For example, when two work promoters request street works on the same street, local authority officers may arrange for the street to be closed only once, minimising disruptions.

However, achieving full coordination is resource and time intensive. It requires strong working relationships between local authorities, utility companies and contractors. Furthermore, interviewees noted that it's not always easy to "sell [this approach] to everyone". Coordinated street works could extend the duration of a road closure to accommodate all the activities that needs to take place. For example, it could lead to several days of road closure to allow the different utility companies to undertake their work instead of a shorter period that would accommodate the work of only one utility company, making it harder for local authority officers to see the benefits of the 'dig it up' approach on some occasions. Coordination of street works might not always reduce clutter, Westminster Council claim that in some instances this may result in more clutter as multiple companies try to use the same part of street space.²⁸



"There's five or six different contractors and they all turn up at different times and they all instruct people differently. And your enforcement teams are very reluctant to actually enforce and start fining businesses because also it's a tough environment for businesses."

Local authority officer

"The rubbish bags are staining and cluttering the pavement."

Local authority officer

"we had many walks with the BID, some of the business representatives to suggest an alternative collection point [...] we faced just such opposition [...] I just feel like it's extremely difficult to change the way businesses operate in general"

Local authority officer

Business refuse

Business refuse also contributes to cluttering central London's streets. Most of the time, businesses leave their waste on the pavement because they lack off-street solutions to dispose of their waste. In most boroughs, businesses arrange waste collection directly with licensed companies or borough's refuse service, which means there are often several companies operating in the same street with different collection times. Furthermore, fly-tipping incidents are often reported in central London, which increase the level of clutter on the pavements.²⁹

Boroughs have already introduced rules to minimise the negative impacts of waste on pedestrians. For example, most councils determine time bands for businesses to place their waste out on public highway at certain times of the day, which in turns reduce the number of items left on the pavement for a long time. However, the problem is still persistent in most parts of London.

On Goodge Street, commercial waste was one of the most prevalent kinds of clutter. A study commissioned by Soho Neighbourhood Forum found that almost 80 per cent of businesses agreed waste is a persistent problem.³⁰

In our research we found that ways to minimise the impacts of business refuse could include:

- Reducing the numbers of waste collection providers, either by:
 - Using regulation to require businesses to choose from two or three alternative licensed providers
 - Requiring local authorities to collect all commercial waste, as happens for domestic waste collection where no private sector companies are allowed to operate, and charge a fee or raise a tax for this.
 - Local businesses working together to pool waste contracts with one or two providers
- Setting up commercial waste collection points, such as communal bins.
- Better enforcement of rules around fly-tipping.

However, these actions require businesses, local authorities and waste collection services to work together to address these issues. They may also require legislative change for example to limit the number of providers or for the boroughs to be sole operators. Local authority officers have mentioned the need to change the culture and encourage businesses to change the way they operate, which isn't easy to do.



Case study: Heart of London Business Alliance’s initiatives to reduce negative impact of commercial waste.

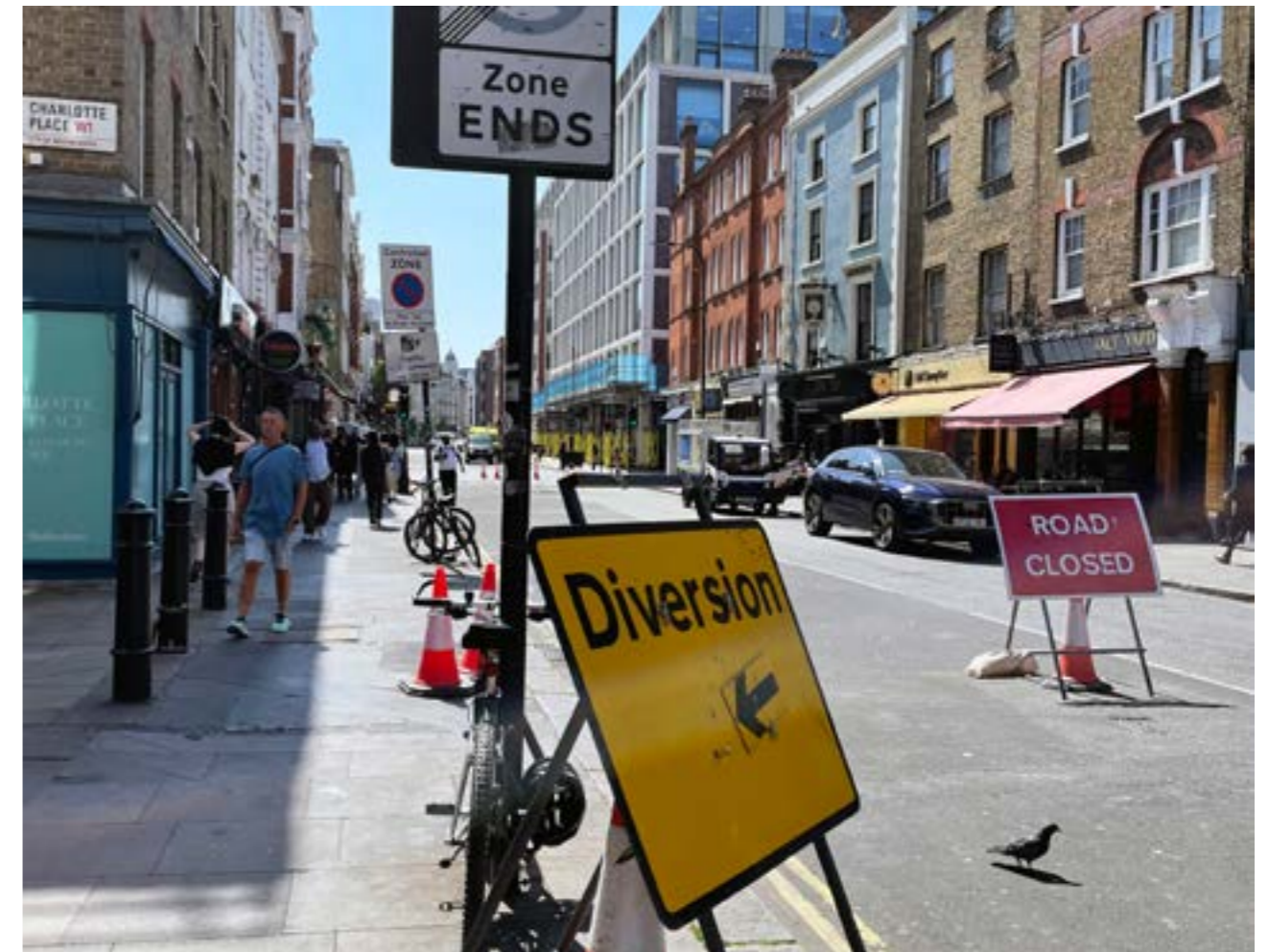
Heart of London Business Alliance (HOLBA) has taken several actions to mitigate the negative impacts of commercial waste on the streets. A commercial waste collection scheme was created to encourage businesses to use a preferred waste collection provider. In 2023, Heart of London Business Alliance (HOLBA) launched an initiative to reduce the amount of fly-tipped commercial waste, encourage off-street waste storage and collections and further raise awareness of waste collection times with businesses in the Piccadilly and St. James area. This initiative aims at decreasing the number of bags placed on the street outside of designated time bands by 80 per cent. This would be done by identifying and educating businesses which aren't adhering the time.

Case Study: NYC Business waste

New York City faces similar challenges when it comes to dealing with commercial waste. As in London, business waste is collected by a network of private waste collection service providers, meaning different collection times and days across the city. In 2023, the city introduced a new law limiting the number of private companies operating in an area, but a report commissioned by New York City emphasised more needs to be done to address this issue. For example, New York City can incentivise developers to include containers in-building and on-site loading docks to keep waste out of the streets.³¹ New York City is also considering containerisation as a way to streamline waste management. While individual containers are likely to increase the levels of clutter in the streets by leading to more objects being placed on pavements, shared containers could prove efficient in reducing transient clutter by creating a dedicated place for businesses to dispose of their waste.³² Alternatively car parking places could be converted to house waste receptacles.



© Lisa Fotios



Signage

Excessive signage contributes to street clutter. Traffic signs, provided by highway authorities to give information to street users, are often placed on the pavement, reducing the width of unobstructed pavement and creating visual clutter. Most regulatory signs aim at enforcing an act, order, regulation or notice to help users comply with the restrictions.

Most of the time, excessive signage in an area result from additional traffic signs being added over time, with no removal of any signs. This is the case in central London where signs remain on the pavement despite being redundant. While TfL regularly removes redundant signs, we heard in our interviews that this problem is more prominent at the intersection of TfL and boroughs streets. For example, when central boroughs implemented 20 mph speed limits on their network, signs to inform streets users were installed at each intersection of boroughs and TfL. However, all these signs are now made redundant as TfL introduced the same speed limit on much of its central road network in 2023. Furthermore, it means that the signs on the network could be downsized, meaning that most of the signs could now only be on one plot instead of two plots.

Addressing street clutter isn't always easy as demonstrated in previous sections. But reducing the number of signs on the street is a relatively straightforward way to do so. Local authorities and TfL should review signage in an area before installing new signs to ensure no sign are redundant. While removing signs incurs costs, it can lead to local authorities saving on sign maintenance and renewal costs.

Pavement advertising

Moveable pavement advertising, typically called 'A boards', are used by businesses to encourage customers into their shops and restaurants. During our street assessments, we observed that most A boards were having negative impacts on the pavement and could be classed as clutter. While they vary in size and design, A boards typically placed by businesses perpendicular to the pavement to catch attention. This means that they can have significant impact reducing the free pavement width.

As transient objects, the location of A boards can vary. The Department for Transport's Inclusive Mobility guidance states that the variable locations of these objects pose particular challenges for people with visual impairments, who rely on a reliable internal 'maps' of the street to get around.³³ Moreover, many businesses will copy the on street advertising strategy of their neighbours leading to clusters of A boards appearing on the same street, and the interaction of these objects can amplify the negative impacts. This was particularly evident on Goodge Street.

Under current regulations, A boards have 'deemed consent' to be located on business forecourts – meaning that businesses do not have to seek permission from the local authority if the sign is placed within these small privately owned spaces (even if adjacent to the footway – the publicly owned part of the pavement). For A boards to be placed on footways, regulations require express advertisement consent from the local authority. However, it is resource and time intensive for local authorities to prosecute businesses who place A boards on the pavement without permission.



Case Study: Edinburgh's ban on A boards

In 2015, Living Streets' Edinburgh group carried out a street audit of the Tollcross district which identified A boards as a major problem for street accessibility.³⁴ The group campaigned for the city council to change their policy on these, which led to a ban being introduced in 2017 and made permanent in 2019.

The success of the scheme has been credited to its simplicity – there are no exceptions to the ban (except for during the annual Edinburgh fringe festival). This means that it creates a level playing field for all businesses, which has helped to reduce backlash.

The uniformity of the ban also makes it easy to enforce – any A board found in the pavement is automatically in breach. This means it is less resource intensive for the council to remove them.



© Randy Laybourne

"I know that it is probably not universally approved of by businesses, but generally there's been remarkably little kick kickback...I think the fact that it's a simple clean ban is really at the heart of it having been accepted by the business community."

Living Streets, Edinburgh

"Levels of voluntary compliance with the ban have been high and enforcement, both through ensuring awareness and dealing with persistent offenders, continues to be successfully undertaken"

Edinburgh Transport and Environment Committee, 2019

There are three potential solutions to reducing this kind of clutter:

- Educate businesses on best practice.
- Introduce local bans.
- Introduce a city-wide ban.

A ban can only be as effective as its enforcement. As previously described, many local authorities already use apps to allow residents to report issues with the highway – this could easily incorporate the reporting of A boards. The local authority enforcement team would need to be sufficiently resourced to respond to these reports, but they could work with BIDs to carry this out (for example by the BID becoming the ‘delegated authority’). Educating businesses on best practice could be more resource intensive as a solution than a ban, without guarantee of improvements on streets. For small businesses who might be particularly impacted by a ban, BIDs and local authorities could explore ways of providing alternative advertising support – such as help to improve shop frontages.

There are already some local bans in place, for example in Hackney and the City of London. TfL have also banned them on their road network. But many of central London’s main streets run through borough boundaries, Goodge Street and Charing Cross Road, for example. Persuading businesses to accept and comply with a ban that only applies to one half of a street is difficult. If the ban were to be city-wide, then the playing field for businesses would be level, and all of London could benefit from reduced pavement clutter. Moreover, businesses would benefit from the increased desirability of walking on London’s streets.

It is increasingly common to find permanent digital advertising boards on London’s streets. These digital boards often incorporate multiple functions, such as being able to be used for phone calls and for device charging (the latter function is often used by homeless people who might not otherwise have access to charging points). However, these boards are large and typically placed perpendicular to the direction of the pavement and so can also contribute to street clutter by reducing accessibility, particularly on narrow streets. While they do provide some public functions, it could be argued these needs could be met either without the accompanying advertising or with a smaller footprint. Digital advertising boards require planning permission from the local authority to be installed, so boroughs do have some control over these. But it has been reported that telephone operators are using the removal of their other assets (discussed in the next section) as leverage for getting permission for new screens. This puts local authorities in a difficult position when trying to reduce street clutter.

Telephone boxes

Phone kiosks were originally installed by phone providers under permitted development rights, meaning they could be installed without planning permission. While some of them are important historic features of certain streets and should be preserved, most of them aren’t used anymore. In 2022, Ofcom published clear guidelines to help understand the ones that need to be preserved. While the majority of the non-historical phone kiosks can be considered redundant, some of them are still quite important, with around 5 per cent of total number of calls made with phone kiosks were made to a helpline.³⁵ Furthermore, some of them are in such a state of disrepair that they wouldn’t be usable.

Despite repeated calls from members of the public and local authorities for phone providers to remove phone kiosks in order to reduce street clutter, phone providers mostly haven’t removed them and local authorities have limited power to do it.

“In fact, there was a ridiculous amount [telephone boxes], when you walked down to Tottenham Court Road, it was stupid amounts mostly because those telephone boxes provide advertising income, not because they’re used to use a phone and in fact they’re mostly antisocial behaviour hotspots.”

Local authority officer

Prior to May 2019, local authorities didn’t have much power to refuse the installation of new phone kiosks (or advertising hubs) installed by phone providers. In 2019, the Town and Country Planning Order 2015 was changed to give more power to local authorities to refuse the installation of new phone kiosks.³⁶ Most local authorities, such as Camden, have created rigorous guidance for officers to assess phone providers applications for new phone kiosks. This is welcome, but it doesn’t help with reducing the number of existing redundant phone kiosks in the streets. We heard in interviews that phone kiosks are used by providers as a way to generate income from advertising.

Camden Council has taken tougher actions to remove phone kiosks after they received complaints from local groups about the poor condition and the number of phone kiosks on Tottenham Court Road. The council issued breach of condition notices on 19 phone kiosks on this road requiring their removal. Furthermore they are working with phone providers to remove other kiosks across the borough. While this approach has been relatively successful at removing a number of them, this undertaking is time consuming and requires a lot of resources, as the Council has to take formal enforcement actions.

BIDs also mentioned their works to remove some of the phone kiosks on their footprints. But again, this work is time and resource consuming for this organisation. Phone providers need to proactively and positively work with local authorities and BIDs to reduce street clutter and make London’s streets more accessible.

Conclusion

This report shows that street clutter is a significant problem in central London. We found that there are ways to reduce street clutter, but they aren’t always easy to implement. We have made practical recommendations for national government, local authorities and other players to reduce street clutter and ensure world-class pavements. While some of the recommendations require long term actions, some of them could be done quickly such as removing all redundant phone kiosks and banning advertising boards, placed outside shops and cafes, for all businesses.

Reducing street clutter is important if we want world-class pavements for London. But it’s also important if we want to encourage more people to walk and use our streets. It’s also key for our shops, cafes, arts galleries, cinemas to ensure people can access them.

“But realistically, if a business pops an A-frame out in the middle of a space, it’s not like we’ve got enforcement officers there every day to pop the A-frame back in again. So that’s a very difficult challenge to overcome.”

London local authority officer

“We have quite a few [phone boxes] that have been identified in the accessibility reports as redundant. [...] I remember they were identified a few years ago when I was the inclusive design officer and it didn’t go anywhere. So these boxes are still there. So maybe in a few years down the line, BT will finally accept and agree to remove them.”

Local authority officer

Appendix

Project's scope

| In Scope | Out of Scope |
|--|---|
| <p>All permanent street furniture (non-transient):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bollards ▪ Lamp posts ▪ Signposts (including where too many signs are generating visual clutter that makes it harder to navigate). ▪ Road name signs ▪ Wayfinding signage ▪ Digital advertising boards ▪ Benches ▪ Public bins ▪ Utility boxes e.g. electricity or water hydrants ▪ Outdoor dining ▪ Cycle racks ▪ Bus stops ▪ Phone boxes ▪ Guard rails <p>All moveable objects (transient):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Road work signs, boards, barriers and debris ▪ Business refuse ▪ Residential refuse ▪ Vehicles on pavements (including micromobility not in designated bays, or unoccupied parked pedicabs) | <p>Moving vehicles: moving vehicles typically occupy road space and so do not 'clutter' the pavements. Riding micromobility vehicles is also illegal on pavements, unless designated otherwise.</p> <p>Street performers and pedicabs: while poorly located street performers and parked pedicabs can generate congestion that disrupts pedestrians and other street users, we are not considering them in the scope of this project. The policy and regulatory landscapes around these topics are distinct to the many other topics that are considered in scope. Resource and time constraints prevent a thorough analysis of these issues.</p> <p>Noise and light from buildings: while these can make people experience the street as cluttered, this is also under different regulatory landscapes outside the scope of this project.</p> <p>Other visual clutter: e.g., anything painted on walls or ground that doesn't impede movement.</p> |

Research methods

This report is based on the findings of a literature review, interviews with policy makers and other experts, a focus group with representatives from business improvement districts, and three street assessments.

Methodology of street assessments

The streets were chosen to represent a diverse range of street types, with varying physical characteristics and uses. A 400m length of both pavements on each street were assessed.

During the assessment, we recorded the location of every in-scope item impacting the pavement. We recorded any negative impacts associated with that object, and then, using the definition outlined earlier, judged if the item was 'street clutter'. If so, we further categorised the severity of its impacts using the following definitions:

- **Minor:** very small negative impacts that may be accompanied by positive impacts. Low priority to be resolved, or no action necessary.
- **Moderate:** some negative impacts. Action necessary, medium priority to resolve.
- **Severe:** substantial negative impacts, most likely across multiple categories. Action necessary, high priority to resolve.

We also considered what action would resolve the issues, broadly grouped as: remove, relocate and redesign, and made observations about what was driving the issue, and how objects were interacting.

The assessments were conducted on the following dates:

- 24th May 2023, 15:00 – Belvedere Road
- 1st June 2023, 10:30 – Charing Cross Road
- 2nd June, 14:00– Goodge Street

Endnotes

1. London & Partners (2022) London 2030 Tourism Vision. Retrieved from: <https://www.londonandpartners.com/our-insight/tourism-vision>
2. Ottoni et al (2016) "Benches become like porches": Built and social environment influences on older adults' experiences of mobility and well-being. Retrieved from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953616304804>
3. Department for Transport (2021) Inclusive Mobility. Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1044542/inclusive-mobility-a-guide-to-best-practice-on-access-to-pedestrian-and-transport-infrastructure.pdf
4. Transport for London (2019) Pedestrian comfort guidance. Retrieved from: <https://content.tfl.gov.uk/pedestrian-comfort-guidance-technical-guide.pdf>
5. Guide Dogs (2023) Streets Ahead Campaign. Retrieved from: <https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/how-you-can-help/campaigning/our-current-campaigns/streets-ahead/>
6. RNIB (2021) Seeing Streets Differently. Retrieved from: https://media.rnib.org.uk/documents/Seeing_Streets_Differently_report_RNIB_2021.pdf
7. Adams, E.J, Cavill, N. and Sharar L.B (2017) Evaluation of the implementation of an intervention to improve the street environment and promote walking for transport in deprived neighbourhoods, BMC Public Health. Retrieved from: <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-017-4637-5>
8. Department for Transport (2021) National Travel Attitudes Study: Wave 5. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-attitudes-study-wave-5/national-travel-attitudes-study-wave-5>
9. Lambeth Council (2022) Kerbside Strategy. Retrieved from: <https://modern.gov.lambeth.gov.uk/documents/s143755/Appendix%20A%20-%20Lambeths%20Kerbside%20Strategy.pdf>
10. Zheng, P, and Hall, R.D (2003) Pedestrian Guard Railing: A Review of Criteria for Installation. Retrieved from: <https://content.tfl.gov.uk/pedestrian-guardrailing-review-of-criteria-for-installation.pdf>
11. Department for Transport (2009) Pedestrian Guardrailing. Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1010876/ltn-209-pedestrian-guardrailing.pdf
12. Street Behaviour (2017) Collisions Before and after the removal of pedestrian railings at 70 junctions and crossings on the Transport for London Road Network. Retrieved from: <https://content.tfl.gov.uk/pedestrian-railings-removal-report.pdf>
13. CIHT (2010) Manual for Streets 2: Wider application of the principles. Retrieved from: <https://www.ciht.org.uk/media/9351/manual-for-streets-2.pdf>
14. Urban Movement (2022) Future streets. Retrieved from: <https://www.urbantransportgroup.org/resources/types/report/future-streets-challenges-and-opportunities>
15. Department for Transport (2017) Vehicle Security Barriers within the Streetscape. Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/876182/tal-1-11-vs-b-within-the-streetscape.pdf
16. Bosetti, N et al (2019) Public London: the regulation, use and management of public spaces. Retrieved from: <https://centreforlondon.org/publication/public-london/>
17. Cross River Partnership (2022) Funding Healthy Street Assets. Retrieved from https://crossriverpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Funding-Healthy-Streets-Assets-Report_-CRP.pdf
18. BBC (2021) Dumped e-bikes causing accidents for blind people. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-62794829>
19. Centre for London (2021) Micromobility in London. Retrieved from: https://centreforlondon.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Micromobility_in_London_Report.pdf
20. Asphalt Industry Alliance (2023) Asphalt Industry Alliance Road Maintenance 2023 Survey. Retrieved from: <https://www.asphaltuk.org/wp-content/uploads/ALARM-survey-2023-FINAL-with-links.pdf>
21. Asphalt Industry Alliance (2022) Asphalt Industry Alliance Road Maintenance 2022 Survey. Retrieved from: <https://www.asphaltuk.org/wp-content/uploads/ALARM-survey-2022-FINAL.pdf>
22. Haylen, A. and Butcher, L. (2019) Street works in England, Briefing paper. Retrieved from: Street works in England (parliament.uk)
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. London Borough of Croydon (2019) The collaboration handbook. Retrieved from: https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Collaboration-Manual_0.pdf
26. Ibid
27. Ibid
28. Westminster (accessed 19.06.23) Street works FAQs. Retrieved from: <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/roads-and-highways/street-works-faqs>
29. Orbitl + Crystal Associates (2023) Soho Comes Clean. Retrieved from: Soho+Comes+Clean+-+FINAL+04.08.22.pdf (squarespace.com)
30. Ibid.
31. New York City Department of Sanitation (2023) The Future of Trash. Retrieved from: <https://dsny.cityofnewyork.us/wp-content/uploads/reports/future-of-trash-april-2023.pdf>
32. Ibid.

33. Department for Transport (2021) Inclusive Mobility. Retrieved from:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1044542/inclusive-mobility-a-guide-to-best-practice-on-access-to-pedestrian-and-transport-infrastructure.pdf
34. Living Streets (2019) Reclaiming pavements for walking. Retrieved from:
<https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/about-us/our-work-in-action/reclaiming-pavements-for-walking-in-edinburgh>
35. Living Streets (2019) Reclaiming pavements for walking. Retrieved from:
<https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/about-us/our-work-in-action/reclaiming-pavements-for-walking-in-edinburgh>
36. London Borough of Camden (2021) Phone Boxes, Report of Director of Economy, Regeneration and Investment. Retrieved from: mgConvert2PDF.aspx (camden.gov.uk)

Open Access. Some rights reserved.

As the publisher of this work, Centre for London wants to encourage the circulation of our work as widely as possible while retaining the copyright. We therefore have an open access policy which enables anyone to access our content online without charge. Anyone can download, save, perform or distribute this work in any format, including translation, without written permission. This is subject to the terms of the Centre for London licence.

Its main conditions are:

- Centre for London and the author(s) are credited
- This summary and the address centreforlondon.org are displayed
- The text is not altered and is used in full
- The work is not resold
- A copy of the work or link to its use online is sent to Centre for London.

You are welcome to ask for permission to use this work for purposes other than those covered by the licence. Centre for London gratefully acknowledges the work of Creative Commons in inspiring our approach to copyright.

To find out more go to creativecommons.org



Published by:
Centre for London 2023
© Centre for London.
Some rights reserved.
House of Sport,
190 Great Dover St,
London SE1 4YB
T: 020 3757 5555
hello@centreforlondon.org
centreforlondon.org
Company Number: 8414909
Charity Number: 1151435

About Centre for London

London faces complex and evolving challenges.

We develop policy solutions to tackle them.

Help us make London better for everyone.

We are London's independent think tank. We are uniquely dedicated to developing new solutions to our city's challenges, for the benefit of all its people. We help policymakers and city leaders think for the long term about London's biggest issues and plan for a better future. We do this through:

Research and evidence: conducting robust, unbiased research and analysis, and collaborating with Londoners and stakeholders across all sectors, to generate new ideas and recommendations.

Convening and collaborating: bringing together citizens, experts and decision makers from diverse standpoints to discuss complex issues in a safe space, devise solutions and work out how to implement them.

Awareness raising and advocacy: being an authoritative policy voice on London and promoting our research and ideas to those with the power to act on them – from the grassroots to London's and the nation's leaders – through briefings, publications, social media, press and events.