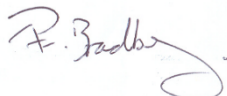


LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All Wards
REPORT TITLE: Obstructions and Advertising Boards (A-boards)	
REPORT OF: Director of Environment and Sustainability	
FOR SUBMISSION TO: Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee	DATE: 13 January 2025
<p>SUMMARY OF REPORT:</p> <p>This report sets out the principles of a trial Pilot project which the Council will conduct, in partnership with Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB), The Fitzovia Partnership and other stakeholders to address the issue of street obstructions and Advertising Boards to help de-clutter streets.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</p> <p>No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Tracey Hogan Streetworks Authorisations and Compliance Manager 5 Pancras Square N1C 4AG Tel: 020 7974 5137 Tracey.Hogan@camden.gov.uk</p>	
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>1. That the Committee note and comment on the contents of the report.</p>	

Signed:



Date: 30 December 2024

1. Background / Context

- 1.1 Business often use advertising boards on footways to promote their services. However, these boards often obstruct pathways, creating hazards for all pedestrians, but these issues are more significant for visually impaired individuals, those with mobility issues, and families with children.
- 1.2 In October 2023, recognising the need for safer and more accessible streets, the 'Centre for London' think tank published a report titled 'Reducing Street Clutter in Central London.' The report underscores the importance of addressing street clutter to promote equality and enhance the walking experience in London. Among various recommendations, the report advocates for a Pan-London approach to banning A-boards and encourages local authorities to collaborate with Business Improvement Districts to mitigate the impact of commercial waste on streets. Goodge Street in Camden was one of the streets highlighted in the report.
- 1.3 Trials have taken place across parts of London with no lasting success, as there is an inconsistent approach when using legislation, and A-boards are still widely used. York and Edinburgh trialled schemes pre-Covid.
- 1.4 This document outlines the current practices, challenges, and objectives of a trial aimed at reducing the use of traditional advertising boards on Goodge Street. By promoting innovative advertising methods and engaging with the business community, the trial seeks to create a safer, more navigable environment for all pedestrians, particularly those with visual impairments.
- 1.5 Red Szell, a blind resident from Hampstead, has been campaigning for Camden to address the issue of advertising boards. Camden Streetworks has engaged with Mr. Szell.
- 1.6 Camden have reviewed our current practices and have set up a A-board Working Group to discuss the issues raised.

2. Current Practices

- 2.1 Currently, the enforcement process for dealing with highway obstructions is ineffective and resource-intensive, failing to deliver lasting change. Businesses are asked to relocate their A-boards to the property line or private forecourt, but without penalties, they often reoffend. The business community feels aggrieved with this approach, seeing it as 'anti-business'. We need to take a more holistic view encompassing all the issues to deliver change and remove all the temporary obstructions.

3. Trial Overview

- 3.1 Camden officers have established a cross-service working group to identify issues, understand current practices, and to navigate the complexities of the current legislation.
- 3.2 Benchmarking exercises and engagement sessions have underscored the need for lasting change that includes the business community and leverages education and innovation. Other local authorities have trialled schemes using various Acts and regulations, but these have been resource-intensive and have not delivered lasting change.
- 3.3 The issues with A-boards are complex, as many traders use private forecourts for advertising, which can preclude enforcement.
- 3.4 Engagement sessions with representatives from Planning, Business Engagement, Streetworks, Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), Fitzrovia BID, and other stakeholders have discussed how to work together to deliver lasting behavioural change. The trial, a collaborative effort with Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and business communities, will initially focus on Goodge Street. The goal is to collect compliance data on a business engagement initiative with business community and the RNIB.
- 3.5 This concept of a trial was borne from stakeholder discussions and fact-finding missions.

4. Objectives

- 4.1 The trial aims to create a safer and more navigable environment for visually impaired individuals by removing physical obstacles within the public realm. It will evaluate the impact and effectiveness of encouraging business to adopt innovative advertising methods instead of traditional A-boards. The trial will take place in Goodge Street, and include the following objectives:
 - Work with the RNIB to introduce 'food style' type ratings for premises. Host a Camden Street event to showcase businesses on Goodge Street, highlighting the absence of A-boards and rewarding compliance.
 - Record footfall data to address concerns about the impact of removing A-boards on business. Show that improved pedestrian flow and street aesthetics will make the area more attractive.
 - Promote innovative alternative advertising methods such as QR codes, banners, digital advertising, BID web pages, newsletters, and local forums.
 - Engage with business to address concerns about A-boards and educate business about the responsibilities of all to improve accessibility for all road users.
- 4.2 Camden Officers and the BID will monitor compliance daily and capture data which will be shared with individual businesses throughout the trial.

- 4.3 It is expected that the trial will highlight additional issues, so the stakeholder group will expand to address any new concerns as A-boards are not the only obstructions.

5. Challenges

- 5.1 Advertising boards are outdated and inefficient approaches for business promotion, but businesses are resistant to change needing support and education on alternative advertising solutions. Businesses are concerned that removing A-boards will reduce footfall and sales.
- 5.2 Lack of compliance is also a challenge, as seen in trials in Edinburgh, and York. Camden can use planning powers to remove advertising boards but prefers to work with and to engage with the business community.

6. Trial Framework

- 6.1 Fitzrovia Partnership have engaged with business in Goodge Street to inform of a proposed A-board trial and encourage engagement with the initiative.
- 6.2 Individual businesses will be invited to attend a site walk with the RNIB volunteers who will highlight the impact of obstruction to visually impaired and collate data on obstructions.
- 6.3 Workshops will be set up to discuss the data collated with business and address their concerns and introduce alternative advertising and promotion methods. Implementation of these methods will coincide with obstruction removal.
- 6.4 Throughout the trial project partners will carry out a compliance inspection regime to monitor effectiveness. This will be coupled with community feedback, alongside targeted follow-up discussions with businesses, RNIB and pedestrians.
- 6.5 Trial findings will be compiled in the final report for assessment of the approach and potential further roll out.

7. Timeline

- 7.1 It is anticipated that the trial will run for three months, based on previous trials in Edinburgh and York, to embed lasting change. The finalised project plan will be compiled after officers have completed the data collection phase.
- 7.2 It is anticipated that phase one of the trial will start in February 2025 with initial data capture and a walk with representatives and volunteers from the RNIB, Camden, and the business community.
- 7.3 The trial period will run from February to April 2025 to account for changes in footfall and weather conditions, address concerns, and embed behavioural change. The Trial data will be analysed and discussed with all stakeholders, including the business community.

- 7.4 The Fitzrovia partnership has made the initial contact with the businesses in Goodge Street to make them aware of the trial as we believe that this initiative should be business lead and will encourage greater compliance by the business community.

Date	Action
February 2025	Trial starts
April 2025	Trial ends
May 2025	Trial data analysis
June 2025	Trial conclusions and recommendations

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 Utilising the data captured from the trial to evaluate the success of the trial and develop a borough wide strategy to either remove A-boards using existing legislation under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Section 336(1), Highways Act 1980 and Schedule 4 of the TfL LLA Act 2003, or design a borough wide implementation strategy and communication plan. Both options will require adequate resourcing.
- 8.2 The project will also expand to improve engagement with visually impaired residents, using data and registers from other services to provide targeted communication in accessible formats. Share success stories of public realm improvements to help blind and partially sighted residents navigate the borough, using RNIB channels and web pages.

9. Finance Comments

- 9.1 There are no significant financial implications and no further comments.

10. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

- 10.1 There are no direct legal implications associated with the implementation of the proposed trial as outlined in the report. The trial is advisory in nature and does not alter the existing legal status of the highway or its management.
- 10.2 It is noted that the project will be undertaken within the parameters of existing statutory powers, and any actions requiring specific legal authority will be subject to further review and advice to ensure compliance with relevant legislation such as the Highways Act 1980, the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and associated regulations.
- 10.3 Care should be taken to ensure that appropriate consultation, where required, is carried out, and due consideration is given to the public sector equality duty

under the Equality Act 2010, ensuring the trial does not indirectly disadvantage any group.

11. Environmental Implications

- 11.1 An improved local environment and clearer public realm with reduced obstruction will enable more people to feel confident in walking and cycling within the borough. Increasing walking and cycling within the borough is a key part of Camden's Climate Action Plan and will help to create a cleaner environment.

REPORT ENDS