Fitzrovia West Neighbourhood Forum

Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 21st of October 2026 at 6:00 PM Sainsbury Wellcome Centre 25 Howland St, London W1T 4JG

MINUTES

1. Julia Haythorn (Chair) opened the meeting and thanked the Sainsbury Wellcome Centre for providing the venue and hospitality and members for attending. The meeting was quorate.

2. The minutes of the last AGM dated 9th of October 2025 were approved.

3. Matt Blades, director of built environment at the Oxford Street Development Corporation ("**OSDC**") provided an overview of the Oxford Street pedestrianisation project:

    a. The OSDC became the planning authority on 10 August 2026 and expects to obtain plan making powers next year.
    b. It will report on pedestrianisation of the Eastern part of Oxford Street (Gt Portland St to Tottenham Ct Rd) in mid 2027. There will be a consultation on this.
    c. Problems with the current position include: few trees, poor connection with neighbouring areas, pedestrian congestion.
    d. Greening was challenging given the proximity of the road surface to the Underground and utilities.
    e. The OSDC has the following aims: a proud welcome; green climate resilience; high quality and robust materials; economic catalyst.
    f. From 25 October Great Portland St to Orchard St will be traffic free with the exception of the North-South crossings. Outside John Lewis and Selfridges the street and pavements will be levelled off (this will be feature of the permanent scheme). The temporary pedestrianisation will be interrupted by a Christmas embargo. Improvements will then be delivered January-Spring 2027. This will be a "test and learn" period which will be followed by a permanent design. There will be an art and culture framework.
    g. Public realm improvements will extend to the whole OSDC area including side streets.

h. In 2027 there will be seating on the road (100 seats and 40 tables) and trees in pots (50).
i. In answer to questions:
    i. Security, pedicabs etc. There will be bollards in the pedestrian zone at 1.1m intervals.
    ii. Rough sleeping. A working group has been set up.
    iii. Cycling. There will be enhanced geo-fencing for ebikes.
    iv. Traffic displacement. Modelling has been done. There will be monitoring with a view to improving flows at junctions.
    v. Trees without planters. OSDC is working on this but it is tremendously difficult.

4. Nick Bailey of the FitzWest Executive spoke on the planning application for the BT tower site (bounded by Howland St, Cleveland St, Maple St and Cleveland Mews):
    a. From 1939 the building on Howland St housed the Museum telephone exchange. The tower was built in 1964 to support microwave aerials used to carry telecoms traffic from London to the rest of the country. In 2011 the tower became technically redundant because of the introduction of optical fibre cables. The tower is Grade II listed.
    b. The site has been purchased for around £275m by MCR London Holdings. The plan is for a 400 room hotel and other uses which may include a visitor experience and exhibition space. The plans involve an entrance and shops along the Cleveland St elevation; trees, vegetation and a pool on the "podium" (base of the tower); a rotating viewing platform; and a main service access in Cleveland Mews (although taxis/Ubers will be discouraged). Vehicular guest access/egress are envisaged to be via Portland Place and Maple St/New Cavendish St.
    c. Ther is a lot of pre-digital technology in the building. Nick suggested a museum for this.
5. CIL projects.
    a. Allessandra Foderaro, Deputy Director, Capital Development Estates Planning & Services, University of Westminster, reported on plans for the former Tower Tavern (closed in 2020) at the junction of New Cavendish St and Cleveland St, which is owned by the University. The Application is for CIL to fund its redevelopment as a "civic reading room, a shared facility, a centre for interdisciplinary exchange and a civic space, but without changing its feel as a pub. There will be a website. Local applications to use the space will be considered. Applicants will be able to bring their own food and drink. Some security will be provided by the University (but not at all hours). There is an exhibition in the premises from 22 October 2026: Drawing The City.

b. Gwilym Harbottle (FitzWest Executive) appealed for further volunteers to water and maintain the planters operated by the Forum (through its CIC) at Hanson St, New Cavendish St, Gt Titchfield St and Gosfield St. If you are interested in being involved (for however short a period) please contact Julia Haythorn using the contact details on the website: https://www.fitzwest.org/contact/.

6. Elections
    a. Nick Bailey, Barbara Corr and Denise Julien were re-elected to the FitzWest Executive.
    b. The co-option to the Executive of Kate Boothman Meier, Director of Corporate Affairs of the New West End Company was approved.

7. Yoram Blumann (FitzWest Treasurer) presented the accounts for the period ending 30 September 2026. There was a surplus of £2,376.

8. Further questions.

    a. Public toilets on the newly pedestrianised Oxford St. It appears that the OSDC has no obligation to provide any.
    b. Public consultation on the OSDC's "test and learn" period. It appears that there will not be any (there will be a public consultation on the proposed pedestrianisation of Oxford St East.

GH 30.10.26