City of Westminster

Encouraging people to walk between popular West End destinations rather than use the tube

Westminster City Council improved a pedestrian route from Leicester Square and Covent Garden aimed at encouraging people to walk between the destinations rather than take the tube.

The project has increased the number of people walking around the Covent Garden area, using the specific advice in NICE guidance on encouraging physical activity.

"Pedestrian volumes in the Long Acre area of the West End increased by 17.6 per cent."

Lydia Clarkson, Area Programme Manager, Westminster City Council

Planning an improved walking environment for the West End

Before the project started, pavements around Covent Garden were narrow with space prioritised for cars. Junctions were inaccessible for people with disabilities and they were not clearly labelled for pedestrians. As a result, many people were using the tube between Leicester Square and Covent Garden, in spite of the stations being less than 500m apart.

Westminster City Council consequently adopted a local area action plan, which included aims to improve the pedestrian environment, and encourage more people to walk between the destinations. The plan was put together in consultation with residents and local businesses.

The council then approached campaign group 'Living Streets' to carry out a community street audit assessing the state of the walking environment. It produced a report outlining recommendations for how to encourage more walking in the area.

Urban designers were then employed to provide concept designs based on the report's recommendations. The walking project was split into four phases, and members from the local community were consulted on each phase.

Securing the backing of partner organisations to help fund improvements

The council followed NICE's public health guidance on physical activity and the environment, which recommends involving local communities and experts at all stages of development of the project. This included consultation with residents and businesses at every stage, from the production of the action plan to development of the concept designs and the final details of the project.

During the design process, the council approached a range of partner organisations that would each benefit from the improvements outlined by the project, in order to securing funding to deliver it. Local landowners were approached, who would benefit through improved footfall and the potential benefit of increasing the value of their retail properties, as was Transport for London (TfL) which would see benefits from reduced congestion on the tube.

Bids for funding were supported by a partnership of neighbouring authorities the council works with, in order to link projects which deliver improvement to public health and air quality through sustainable transport corridors.

Cleaner streets, wider pavements, more pedestrians

TfL monitored the area before the project began, during each of its phases, and following completion. It observed that by 2011, pedestrian volumes in the Long Acre area of the West End had increased by 17.6 per cent.

Between 2005-08 the number of people getting to Long Acre from Leicester Square tube station, and then walking the rest of the distance had increased to 27 per cent. Furthermore, perceptions of crowding, personal security, cleanliness, and the number and speed of vehicles were all more positive.

Feedback from the local community suggests that the scheme has made a positive contribution to the conservation of the area, without compromising the street layout. The pavements were significantly widened, crossings made more accessible and high quality materials were used, which have all made walking more appealing in the area.

Key learning points

- an action plan, aligned with good policy and vision, allowed stakeholders to see the benefits that they would gain from the project
- the council felt the action plan was also crucial in helping to secure funding from the stakeholders, and that support and funding from third party organisations were important for the project's success

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