

# What the area is like and what the issues are





## A place with a variety of roles and wide mix of uses

The area is located at the heart of London and is home to residential communities, as well as being a successful commercial area with concentrations of retail, offices, hotels and services. On a daily, especially weekday, basis large numbers of people come to visit or work in the area or are passing through. It is served by two major stations used by over 150,000 commuters a day and major transport changes are underway.

### Community

There are established communities in the area, which include a mixture of ages, cultures and backgrounds. Much of the data that the Council currently uses is still based on the 2001 census as the 2011 census data at this level of detail was not available at the time of writing. The need for up to date data regarding the residential communities was raised during the place plan consultations.

Residential areas vary in character from smaller scale buildings on a grid of streets around Museum Street, more recent Council developments from the 1950's and 60's around Red Lion Square and the more prominent commercial architecture of Holborn, contrasted with the adjoining

medieval origins of the Inns of Court. The types of properties people live in range from elegant town houses, flats above commercial units, mansion blocks, small estates to new purpose built accommodation such as the Matilda apartments at Central St Giles. Much of the Holborn area itself and the wider area is protected by being designated as a Conservation Area. This recognises the significant and historic development of this part of Camden and the importance of protecting and enhancing the area's heritage.



- The population of the area of focus was 4,550 in 2001. Natural population growth and new housing in the area means this figure is likely to be higher - the 2011 census will provide more up to date information.
- The population make up is similar to other areas of Camden, with a slightly higher than average Bangladeshi community of 8% compared to the average of 6.3%
- One pocket of the area of focus is identified as being within the 20-30% most deprived in England (2010). This is to the south of the British Museum area (between Drury Lane and Kingsway.)
- Most housing in the area is rented (75% of all tenures) with a quarter of rented accommodation being Council let.
- Twice the number of people than the Camden average rent from Housing Associations or Registered Social landlords
- Holborn and Covent Garden ward has the highest employment density in the borough with 99,300 employee jobs (2008), accounting for 36% of all jobs in the borough.



- The majority of jobs in the Holborn & Covent Garden ward are office based, with 44% of jobs in professional and business services and 18% in communication and financial services (borough average 31% and 15% respectively). (ONS Annual Business Inquiry 2008).
- The St Giles Circus area has a higher proportion of jobs in distribution and hospitality, such as restaurants, hotels and shops. The dominance of office based employment increases around Holborn tube station.

## A place where people work

As part of central London, the area is a major business and employment centre, strategically located between the West End and the City.

Holborn has a strong commercial focus, with a significant number of offices, hotels and services and links to the Inns of Court and legal professions. There are retail areas along High Holborn from New Oxford Street to Holborn Circus and most of Kingsway, as well as along Tottenham Court Road, and

specialist retailing areas that provide a variety of employment opportunities.

The area has a number of active business organisations with inmidtown (a Business Improvement District), the Fitzrovia Partnership (which became a Business Improvement District in July 2012) and the Midtown Business Club. Improving the links between business and the local community was high priority for stakeholders at the Place Plan and Neighbourhood Forum workshops.



## A place that people visit

The British Museum and its surroundings is one of London's main tourist destinations, attracting over 5 million people a year.

The area around the museum includes a mix of supporting uses including specialist retailers, such as collectable items and antiquarian books, prints, coins and vintage cameras. These uses contribute to the distinctive character of the area and are a successful part of the economy associated with the museum. Small hotels, several offices and cafes and restaurants also make up part of the area. There has been pressure for changes of use from retail to other uses, mainly to food drink and entertainment uses, which has threatened the unique specialist retail character of this area.

Retail uses in the Museum Street area are protected by the **Revised Planning Guidance for Central London (Food, Drink and Entertainment, Specialist and Retail Uses) 2007**.

Denmark Street's 'Tin Pan Alley' has been synonymous with the UK's popular music scene since the latter part of the 20th Century attracting artists, including David Bowie and the Beatles, to its recording studios, music shops, manufacturers and publishers.

The Council's Planning Guidance for Central London identifies Denmark Street as a



specialist use area and seeks to protect uses associated with the music industry to preserve this cultural cluster.

Covent Garden is a short walk to the south of the area of focus. The major stations of Kings Cross, St Pancras and Euston are to the north, with Oxford Street to the west and the City to the east. As a result, very large numbers of visitors come into the area and move around and through it on a daily basis.

### A place to be entertained

The area has a number of restaurants, pubs and clubs and is also close to the Theatreland of the West End and the nightlife of Soho and Covent Garden. This means that large numbers of people pass through the area at night to catch buses and make their journey home. While these businesses contribute to the bustling nature of the area, add to the range of goods and services on offer and contribute to the local economy, they can also be a source of concern.

Part of the area of focus falls within **the Seven Dials Special Policy Area for licensing**. This was designated in 2004 and extended to the north in 2009.



According to Police figures, the Seven Dials Special Policy Area contains 10.9% of Camden's restaurants, bars, theatres and other similar uses, despite covering only 1.6% of the borough's area. In 2004 - 2009, 20.3 alcohol related violent crimes per hectare was recorded in the Special Policy Area, compared to a Camden average of 3.8.

Local people particularly raised concerns about the area around Tottenham Court Road and New Oxford Street, where a number of late opening premises are located in a small area.

### A place undergoing major investment and physical change

The areas around Tottenham Court Road station and Holborn station have both been identified as areas for future growth, particularly for more housing and jobs, in the 2011 London Plan and the Camden Core Strategy, which are statutory planning documents.

**The London Plan (July 2011) and Camden's Core Strategy (Nov 2010) have set targets for new homes and jobs to be accommodated in growth areas by 2031. These are:**

Tottenham Court Road Opportunity Area:

- A minimum of
- 420 new homes
- 5,000 new jobs

The Holborn Intensification Area:

- A minimum of
- 200 new homes
- 2,000 new jobs



The amount of new construction of buildings and infrastructure, with new homes, new businesses and the influx of people from this growth, means there is a need to ensure a coordinated and strategic approach.

### **A place undergoing major changes to stations**

The growth of these areas is being both supported and driven by transport improvements in the area. Tottenham Court Road station is being upgraded, the capacity of the Northern Line increased and a new Crossrail station will open in 2018.

These works will substantially increase the number of people using the station from 30 million per year in 2009 to 56 million per year in 2018, when all the works are due to be completed.

These works are now well underway and bring issues for users and residents while the construction progresses with the inconveniences of staged temporary closures as well as noise and nuisance from the actual construction. Once complete, the works will transform the area.

Holborn station is often overcrowded at peak travel times and temporary closures

are used to manage the flow of people. This is a source of frustration to commuters and businesses in the area.

### **Opportunity to create an attractive and high quality new public open space**

The new Tottenham Court Road station entrances and exits will be set within a major new public space, which will play a fundamental role in improving movement through the area, and it will create an exciting and interesting Central London location.

Collaborative work between the local authorities, Greater London Authority (GLA), Transport for London (TfL), Design for London, Crossrail and landowners has been taking place to try and ensure that the best advantage is taken from the opportunities presented.

### **Opportunities from major developments**

There are also a number of key development sites around this area in both Westminster and Camden, which will have significant roles to play in transforming the area.

A number of these are included in Camden Council's **Sites Allocations** document and include Centrepont, Denmark Street and

Tottenham Court Road, Oxford Street and Charing Cross Road properties, which are around St Giles. The document also includes a number of large sites for redevelopment along New Oxford Street towards Holborn and the former St Martins College site on Southampton Row.

Maximising the benefits from major developments, especially for local communities, is a key issue for local stakeholders.

Identifying the landowners of sites in the area, in order to enable engagement and discussions with the local community, was raised as a key issue at the second Place Plan workshop.

### **A place that can be difficult to move around**

This part of London has been difficult to move around for a long time, in parts it is dominated by traffic and buses and major roads, creating barriers for pedestrians and cyclists.

At St Giles Circus and Tottenham Court Road station problems stem from the failure to complete planned highway works in the 1960's when the landmark Centrepont was built. This left the area a heavily congested traffic island.



The pedestrian experience around Holborn is poor in places, with overcrowded footpaths, poor pedestrian crossings, traffic queues and high road casualty levels. The one-way gyratory system around Holborn is a source of major concern and contributes to pollution in the area. The busy junctions of Holborn and Kingsway also contribute towards the difficulties people have in moving around the area.

Pedestrian and cycle routes between St Giles and Holborn are unattractive and hostile in places, discouraging people to make the short journey between the two areas as well as between the adjoining areas of Seven Dials, Covent Garden, Soho and beyond. With increased numbers, this problem will become worse and improving the pedestrian experience is even more vital in order to ensure that Holborn benefits from the investment in infrastructure in the area.

A number of potential development sites and blank frontages contribute to the sense of separation and lack of identity for this part of the New Oxford Street corridor.

Stakeholders felt there are not enough signs for pedestrians in the area which makes it difficult for people to find their way, especially

if they go off the main roads seeking quieter, smaller streets with less traffic.

### **A place in need of investment in housing and community facilities**

The Council is responsible for a wide range of property in the area including housing estates, community buildings and commercial premises. A number of these are ageing and require investment to ensure they are fit for purpose in the longer term. In the Place Plan workshops local people highlighted the need for more affordable family housing in the area. Finding space to meet housing needs in this intensely developed part of central London was raised as a factor which will influence the future of the area.

Camden Council is exploring how to make more efficient use of the Council's property and buildings across the borough as part of its **Community Investment Programme (CIP)**. A number of future opportunities have been identified in, or close to, the area of focus to help improve housing choice, deliver more affordable homes and improve community facilities. These include the Tybalds and Bourne housing estates, and Parker Street hostel. Local communities are being consulted on proposals as they

develop. These proposals are explored in more detail in the relevant 'Delivering the Vision' sections.

#### **Community Investment Programme (CIP)**

A long term Council programme to improve, shape and transform places and services which aims to:

- manage Council resources most effectively in response to reductions in Capital funding from central government
- make and generate investment in better quality, fit-for-purpose facilities
- release receipts for investment in the capital programme, including improving the quality of Council homes and providing much needed affordable homes
- deliver a range of improvements to housing estates, schools, open spaces and community facilities in consultation with building occupiers and local residents



- investigate whether properties can be used in other ways in order to meet the needs and aspirations of local communities
- More detail of the programme as it develops can be found on the Council website.

## Community facilities to meet needs of existing and future residents

There are strong partners and agencies working in the area and a variety of community centres including the Dragon Hall, Covent Garden Community Centre, 1A Centre and Holborn Community Centre.

Ensuring the long term sustainability of these services is a key concern for residents.

The Council has responsibility for some key community assets in the area including Holborn Library and the Oasis leisure centre which provides health facilities for both local residents and non residents.

The need for a local secondary school was raised by stakeholders at the Place

Plan workshops and Bloomsbury Village Neighbourhood Planning consultations.

Representatives at the Place Plan workshops also identified the need for good services and community facilities to service both residents and businesses. There was concern about how to maintain a sense of community with the expected increases in the daily influx of workers and tourists.

## Open space in the area

For a central London location, the area has reasonable access to open space, with a mixture of spaces, ranging from more formalised space and squares, such as in front of the British Museum, St Giles Church graveyard, Bloomsbury Square, Red Lion Square and the hidden gem of Phoenix



community garden. Place Plan workshops and Bloomsbury Village Neighbourhood Planning consultations showed that improving and maintaining existing open space, such as Red Lion Square, is a priority for local people and businesses as well as increasing open space where possible.

## Community safety issues

The main community safety concerns in the area are street crime and alcohol/late night activity related issues. This is associated with the large volume of people passing through and visiting the area each day and night. There has been a recent sharp increase in snatch theft, not dissimilar to wider trends. Drug dealing and begging have also been concerns.

Community safety has improved in recent years through a number of means including the West End Drugs Partnership, which involves local people in discussions about community safety and how perceptions of the area can be improved.

The Bloomsbury Village Neighbourhood Planning consultations in particular raised crime and safety as a key issue in the area.



## A place with strong historic character but areas that lack identity and a clear purpose

Bloomsbury Village, the British Museum and Holborn have distinct identities and St Giles has strong historical connections, with the old High Street and church. However, parts of the area lack this character and clear purpose.

## Valued historic character

Much of the area covered by this Place Plan, as well as the wider area, fall within designated conservation areas to recognise and protect their significant architectural and historic character. There are also numerous listed buildings in the area, including the iconic Centrepoint tower, the internationally acclaimed British Museum and St Giles' Church, and also mansion blocks such as 23 -26 Museum Street and 39 – 42 Russell Street, to name just a few.

## Denmark Street Conservation Area

is designated for its historic street pattern dating back to the 12th century, the magnificent grade I listed St Giles Church and the unique survival of early Georgian terraced housing built in the 1680s on both sides of Denmark Street and the network of narrow passageways that give it an intimate character.



**Bloomsbury Conservation Area** covers a large area up to Euston Road and Lincoln's Inn Fields in the south. The area is broken down into sub areas, each with a different character. For example, the area around Museum Street has a distinctive character created by its tight grid of narrow streets containing small, intimately-scaled blocks of

development. In contrast, High Holborn has less consistency of architectural style and age, with a variety of plot widths and building heights.



The intimate and historic spaces of **Hanway Street Conservation Area** to the north west of Tottenham Court Road station are in sharp contrast to the scale and noise of Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road which enclose it on two sides. The relatively quiet streets provide a welcome break for the cyclist and pedestrian. This area is also potentially affected by redevelopments in the area.

**Covent Garden/Seven Dials Conservation Area** to the south of the area, with its distinctive 17th century radiating road layout creating a distinctive sense of place, is a draw to tourists and shoppers.

**Kingsway Conservation Area**, running south from Holborn station preserves the outstanding examples of early 20th century commercial architecture on this 'new' road of 1905, which was driven through a densely populated area with medieval origins.

### Parts lacking identity or clear purpose

The area near Holborn and on New Oxford Street can feel disconnected and people are not drawn to explore what it has to offer. This is exacerbated by the physical and visual disruption resulting from the construction

works happening around Tottenham Court Road / Crossrail station.

Large numbers of people go to the British Museum or pass through on their way to Covent Garden; however, they tend not to stay and spend time in the area.

This is in contrast to Oxford Street and the West End which have a strong shopping focus, Leicester Square and Shaftsbury Avenue with their entertainment focus and Covent Garden known for being a high quality place to eat, drink and visit specialist shops.

With the substantial increase in the number of people using the Tottenham Court Road station, there are considerable opportunities to change this, and involve existing communities and businesses in shaping this change.

