Retail Strategy Summary

Praed Street

Westminster High Streets

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City of Westminster

Augarde & Partners

What is a Retail Strategy?

A Retail Strategy sets out a clear, evidence-based plan for how high streets can evolve to meet the changing needs of their communities, businesses and visitors. It defines the role and character of each area, identifies market opportunities and challenges, and establishes practical actions to support long-term vitality. At its core, a Retail Strategy provides a framework for shaping the right mix of uses, strengthening local identity, and ensuring that commercial activity contributes positively to the wider place.

This Retail Strategy was commissioned by Westminster City Council as part of the Paddington Bayswater High Streets Programme. The programme focuses on three key areas: the Queensway/Westbourne Grove cluster, Praed Street, and Edgware Road (south). Together, these high streets play an important role in the economic and social life of the area and present significant opportunities to better serve residents, workers and visitors.

The Strategy explores how each high street develops a distinct and sustainable offer, informed by local demographics, visitor patterns and market demand. It considers tenant mix, vacancy, affordability and investment conditions, and sets out a realistic and deliverable plan that aligns Council levers with commercial realities.

Why have we developed a Retail Strategy?

The Retail Strategy aims to complement the Place Strategies by introducing a crucial layer of market analysis and visioning. By focusing on the economic perspective, we aim to create a framework for a dynamic and responsive retail environment that meets the needs of residents and visitors, aligns with the viability requirements of executive stakeholders and fosters long-term growth and development.

How will we use the Retail Strategy?

By integrating insights from targeted studies, conversations, and data analysis, the strategy proposes optimal tenant mixes to position the future retail offer in a manner that is attractive within the broader London context, locally relevant, and reflective of the area's heritage and character.

The Retail Strategy is linked with and will inform several projects:

- **Place Strategies**: the character of the commercial offer proposed for each High Street will need to align with the vision proposed by the Place Strategies
- **Matchmaking Platform & Meanwhile On:** the proposed tenant mixes will aide our selection process of eligible and desirable uses for each location
- **High Street Rental Auction:** the proposed tenant mixes will inform the bidding framework and define the commercial uses that should be targeted.



Matchmaking Platform

The Matchmaking platform is a strategic service designed to curate and connect high-quality, diverse independent brands and tenants with available retail spaces. Its primary goal is to reduce vacancy rates while fostering vibrant, resilient high streets that reflect and serve the unique character and needs of local communities and their visitors.



Meanwhile On

Meanwhile On is a supportive platform for emerging brands, entrepreneurs, and creatives to launch stores. By transforming shops that are currently empty or with an undesirable use, we are introducing new concepts and experiences to add vibrancy to high streets while incubating brands that have the potential to become long-term occupiers.



High Street Rental Auction

The High Street Rental Auction would allow Westminster City Council to take action to fill persistently vacant commercial properties by forcing landlords to rent them out to new businesses or community groups.

The context

Westminster City Council is developing approaches to support improvement to local high streets through the Paddington-Bayswater High Streets Programme. While the Place Strategies put forward spatial interventions for the Bayswater high streets, Praed Street, and Edgware Road (south), the Retail Strategies delve deeper into the commercial, leisure and community offer.

The aim of this work is to provide the Council and our partners with a clearer overview of the challenges and opportunities for interventions to improve the offer in response to resident and visitor needs.

Please note that this document is a summary of the full Retail Strategy, which has been prepared for local landowners and investors. The full technical report is available on request.

About Praed Street

Praed Street was originally laid out in the early 19th century, named after William Praed, chairman of the company which built the nearby canal basin. It developed into a dynamic district centre for transport, life-sciences, health and technology, aided by the development of Paddington Station and St Mary's hospital and the subsequent arrival of the Tube in 1863. More recently the regeneration of Paddington Basin and the arrival of the Elizabeth line, have been significant in driving economic growth and have contributed to making Praed Street a busy place.

Modern day Praed Street remains the main gateway from Paddington Station to the surrounding neighbourhoods and central London. For many visitors, it is their first window to the city. It serves a wide mix of people – tourists and visitors, commuters and workers, hospital users and a large and growing local, residential community.

Praed Street plays an important role in supporting movement between Paddington Station, St Mary's Hospital and Paddington Basin and experiences high pedestrian movement, especially in the daytime. However, its function is currently shaped more by through-movement than by dwell time, meaning many people pass along the street rather than stopping to spend time there.

A key objective should be to reposition the area as a public destination in its own right, rather than mainly a place people pass through.

This summary draws on a combination of data analysis, site visits, and stakeholder engagement to provide a clear, up-to-date understanding of Praed Street. The study reviewed high street health indicators, retail composition and vacancy data, relevant planning policy, and undertook on-site observations and discussions with local stakeholders.

The findings bring together quantitative evidence and qualitative insights to identify key strengths, challenges, and opportunities and to inform thinking on how the high street could evolve in the future.



Praed Street's shops

Praed Street's retail offer is **closely shaped by tourism and short-stay visitors**. Souvenir shops, luggage stores and currency exchanges reflect its role as a gateway location serving people passing through the area.



Praed Street
Westminster High Streets - Retail Strategy

Whilst there are 15 convenience stores, including a 24-hour Tesco Express, **very few shops encourage browsing or longer visits.**
There are only five clothing retailers, and no large supermarkets.

There are
257
retail and leisure units within the Praed Street study area.

In the F&B sector convenient food options dominate, with takeaways, cafés, and convenience outlets making up for
72%
of all food and beverage uses.

The largest category is
Services & Amenities
66 Units
26%
of the street

including estate agents, hair and nail salons, barbers, travel agents, dry cleaners and bureaux de change.

There is limited provision for community, cultural or civic uses.
The area does not contain a library, cinema or dedicated meeting space.

While there are some everyday convenience shops serving workers and residents, **the overall mix is strongly visitor-oriented.**

Many shops on Praed Street are
very small and constrained.

This is particularly the case in the parade opposite St Mary's Hospital, where shops are shallow due to underground tracks running directly behind

Praed Street's property market

Praed Street has **fewer empty shops than most high streets in London**

Despite being close to Paddington Station, rents on Praed Street are nearly
60% higher
than those on shopping streets surrounding London Bridge station - another major London transport hub.

How does Praed Street perform as a high street?

The composition of retail outlets along Praed Street reflects its location, serving as a central transport hub close to Paddington Station and as a gateway to London for many visitors.

The offer is short-term and convenience-led, with little to attract people to dwell in the area and even less to support residents specifically.

- Services tailored for visitors are prominent, most notably the 25 that provide accommodation, 12 bureaux de change and four souvenir and luggage shops
- There are no large supermarkets serving the area's residential community; however, there are 15 convenience stores to meet the day-to-day needs of both residents and those passing through
- For residents, health services include four dentists, an optician, an NHS mental health centre, several complementary health centres and the major St Mary's Hospital
- A range of professional services are available, including solicitors, accountants, three banks (HSBC and two international banking outlets) and 14 estate agents
- community facilities such as a library, cinema or meeting space are absent, leaving a gap in everyday services and amenities that could help strengthen Praed Street's local neighbourhood role.



Footfall is **very high throughout the week,** driven by station use, visitor activity, and hospital activity, but is **lower on weekends.**



Spending is relatively low compared to similar high streets nearby, especially considering the high volume of people who pass through Praed Street.



The evening and night-time economy is relatively weak. A large number of shops remain open late, especially food premises, and footfall remains high into the early evenings, but spending falls significantly beyond 3pm.

Footfall vs spend (proportional representation)





What do local people and businesses think?

Findings in this section draw on engagement undertaken in 2023 and 2025 as part of the Paddington-Bayswater High Streets Programme, including surveys, stakeholder interviews and workshops with residents, businesses, BIDs and landowners.

Residents and visitors consistently describe Praed Street as convenient and well-connected, but lacking character and quality.

- Praed Street is valued for its direct access to Paddington Station and St Mary's Hospital
- Many respondents appreciate the availability of everyday essentials
- However, there is a strong perception that the street feels dominated by movement rather than activity
- Shopfront quality and overall appearance are frequently described as tired
- A lack of welcoming places to sit, meet or spend time was repeatedly raised.

"Good selection of the products and services I need."

"Every day I walk along Praed Street and feel depressed by the poor quality, cheap-looking shops"

"I think the presentation of these amenities in the Paddington area leaves alot to be desired."

Landowners, developers and the Business Improvement District (BID) recognise Praed Street's strategic importance, particularly given its location next to Paddington Station and wider regeneration in the area.

- The proximity to Paddington Station and ongoing regeneration are seen as significant opportunities
- However, very small and constrained units limit the range of occupiers
- Fragmented ownership makes coordinated improvement more challenging
- The redevelopment of St Mary's Hospital is viewed as a key catalyst for long-term change.

"Paddington is famous around the world, but when you actually get here... it's pretty poor."

"If you've got...a unit three metres by three metres, what are you going to put in there?"

"The units just don't lend themselves to...modern trading."







What could Praed Street be like in the future?

Westminster City Council wants to support Praed Street to become a more welcoming and usable high street; less a corridor and more a place to spend time.

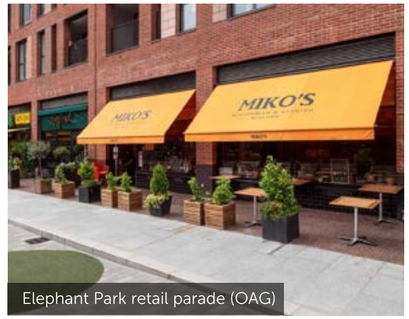
This would mean interventions, policies and incentives that:

- Support uses that make Praed Street a **more enjoyable place** and **encourage people to dwell and spent time**
- **Improve shopfront quality** and the **public realm**
- Support a **more diverse**, **mix of shops and services**
- Encourage a **better night-time offer** to address the needs of the hospital and station users
- **Prioritise improving the high street offer** as part of wider regeneration in Paddington, such as
  - Delivery of some **larger shop units**
  - A new **high-quality retail parade** on the northern side of the street and in other new developments.



Dom's Subs, Hackney

Larger retail units with unique retail/F&B offer in new development



Elephant Park retail parade (OAG)



Creme Cookies, Soho

High quality retail and F&B attractive for locals and visitors



Brityard, Regent Street (LDN.news)

Events, gallery, music and performance spaces contributing to the night-time economy, potentially in the new developments or existing retail units outside opening times


Third Man Records, Soho (Mixonline)

The examples are drawn from elsewhere in London and the UK and demonstrate the type of models that could work in busy high streets.

Spaces for early-stage businesses and retailers to trade, including market and pop-up spaces



Evening cafes - Chapter 72, Bermonsey



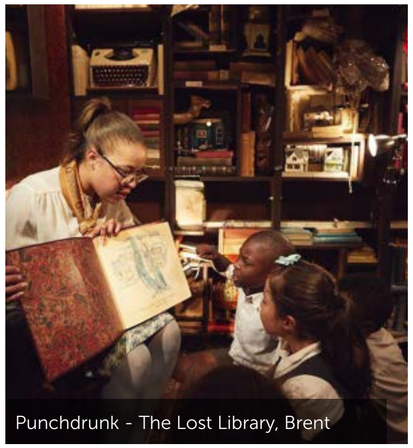
All Greens (Studio Mama)

General purpose community spaces, hireable halls and meeting spaces


Poplar Union (Poplar Union)



Nourish Hub, Hammersmith (RCKa)


Punchdrunk - The Lost Library, Brent


Nudge Community Builders, Union Corner (Stonehouse Action)

Temporary/pop-ups events and market spaces drawing footfall to the heart of Praed Street and offering quality products for residents and visitors


Migrant Makers Market

Shops and services that are also dwell spaces



Look mum no hands (Road.cc)

Next steps for Westminster City Council

The next phase focuses on translating the Retail Strategy into coordinated, deliverable action. This includes shaping major regeneration proposals, actively influencing development sites, and working closely with landlords, businesses and delivery partners to rebalance the retail and leisure mix.

A structured programme will align planning, property, licensing and economic development tools to support change. Real-time market intelligence, proactive engagement and targeted interventions will help seed priority uses and address vacancies.

Alongside physical improvements and public realm enhancements, the approach strengthens Praed Street's identity as Paddington's town centre and ensures regeneration activity supports a vibrant, inclusive and commercially sustainable high street.

Short term

- Actively engage in the St Mary's Hospital masterplanning process to ensure strong connectivity, appropriate ground floor design and an enhanced retail mix
- Establish a targeted landlord and tenant engagement programme to rebalance uses across existing retail units
- Work with major landowners and head leaseholders to shape the occupier mix using the matchmaking service, Meanwhile On and Curate On. The affordability and vacancy levels present opportunities for selective leasing or property acquisition. Consider selective acquisitions where they support long-term strategic objectives
- Review and strengthen the night-time economy, including licensing approaches, restaurant provision and opportunities for evening events.
- Explore options for providing local cultural grant funding to support the growth of cultural activity on the high street.

Medium term

- Identify and bring forward suitable locations for markets and flexible event spaces
- Influence new developments to incorporate active ground floor uses and modern retail infrastructure
- Engage planning policy to enable a broader range of unit sizes while maintaining attractive shopfronts and character
- Proactively shape refurbishment and regeneration opportunities at key sites
- Support a stronger mix of independent retailers, specialist services and higher-quality food and beverage uses.

Long term

- Embed Praed Street's role as Paddington's town centre, strengthening connections to surrounding assets and neighbourhoods
- Deliver a diverse range of unit sizes and occupiers that serve residents, workers and visitors across income groups
- Establish flexible markets as a recurring and recognisable feature of the area
- Support space for community uses, emerging businesses and cultural activity within new developments
- Position Praed Street as a destination in its own right — a place to visit and spend time, not simply pass through.



Methodology, references and sources

This summary draws on a combination of data analysis, site visits, and stakeholder engagement to provide a clear, up-to-date understanding of Praed Street. The study reviewed high street health indicators, retail composition and vacancy data, relevant planning policy, and undertook on-site observations and discussions with local stakeholders. The findings bring together quantitative evidence and qualitative insights to identify key strengths, challenges, and opportunities and to inform thinking on how the high street could evolve in the future.

References

The Retail Strategy was shaped by a number of datasets, existing borough-wide strategies, engagement with executive stakeholders and findings from the extensive engagement exercise carried out in 2023:

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Acknowledgements

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