

EXPERT OPINION

West End Needs to Find Final Piece of the Jigsaw

Larger Entertainment Venues Would Help London's West End Create a Well-Rounded Offer



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A year ago, I wrote about the redevelopment of Oxford Circus and other initiatives by Shaftesbury and Capco – this seems pretty timely right now given the ongoing conversations around a West End merger. The biggest concern at the time was footfall – we were still in and out of lockdown restrictions, with workers, shoppers and tourists remaining very much absent from the West End scene. Fast forward to today, the West End is recovering. While there is still a way to go, its vibrancy is returning and its vitality restored.

It seems to me that central London is now seen as a leisure destination, perhaps much more than it once was. The variety of restaurants and bars is world class and hard to beat, likewise with its choice of theatres, museums, and members' clubs. Yet there seems to be a missing piece that I think would complete the picture.

Our food hall scene is still burgeoning, with some bright stars shining through such as Arcade in CentrePoint, and soon-to-be Battersea Power Station. My sense, however, is imaginations are stretching, and visitors are expecting a much more complete offer.

It's no longer about great food and beverage and great retail; it's the mix of the two, bridged by inspiring leisure concepts to create that rounded offer. We seem to be short on competitive socialising, and you only need to look at the runaway success of Swingers in Oxford Circus, with its triumph proven in its expansion of a further floor. We are also lacking music venues – I think we could benefit from a Madison Square Gardens type setting to bring in that scene.

I understand that sometimes it is difficult to justify these larger venue spaces on a micro level, as they don't always win the value proposition. However, more than anything right now, our London estates have the potential to assemble an offer that creates that total entertainment and leisure experience.

Now is the time to see the bigger picture, to not only attract the best from the UK and overseas, but to make room for the next generation of larger entertainment venues, ensuring we continue to be the leaders in hospitality.

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