

Trafalgar Square

A World Square for All

A
Vision: the new central stair, as proposed

B
Reality: photo of new central staircase in use



A



B

The problem

The network of public spaces in central London between Trafalgar Square and Parliament Square is the heart of national government and, for many, the heart of London. A masterplan for the area was commissioned in 1996 by Westminster City Council and the Greater London Authority, calling for improvements in the quality of the public realm, which – although of supreme historic importance – was perceived to be unpleasant, unsafe, and dominated by traffic.

Our contribution

We provided an initial analysis of pedestrian activity patterns, which highlighted two key issues: Londoners avoided the centre of Trafalgar Square and tourists failed to make the journey between Trafalgar Square and Parliament Square. Our identification of these problems underpinned Norman Foster's competition entry and helped his team secure the commission.

We then undertook an intensive observation study of pedestrians in the area and developed the most advanced pedestrian movement model of that time. This model allowed us to quickly diagnose problems throughout the masterplan area and identify design solutions. These included a major, new staircase into Trafalgar Square, selective pedestrianisation of the public realm and the re-connection of Parliament Square to the wider area.

But, given the historic importance of the context, these solutions required a very convincing technical argument. We were charged with assembling evidence for that argument.

The outcome

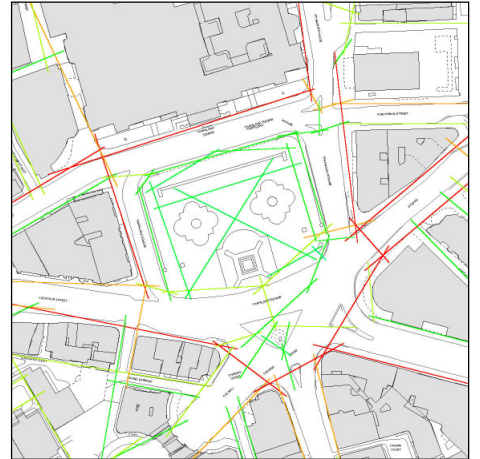
The evidence proved compelling, and permission to move forward was granted by all bodies concerned. Trafalgar Square is the first element of the masterplan to be completed in 2003 and has been a huge success, with levels of pedestrian movement in the square increasing by thirteen times.

The space is now animated throughout the day by tourists and Londoners alike, demonstrating that the UK can create great public spaces to rival those in the rest of Europe.

C
Before the central
staircase

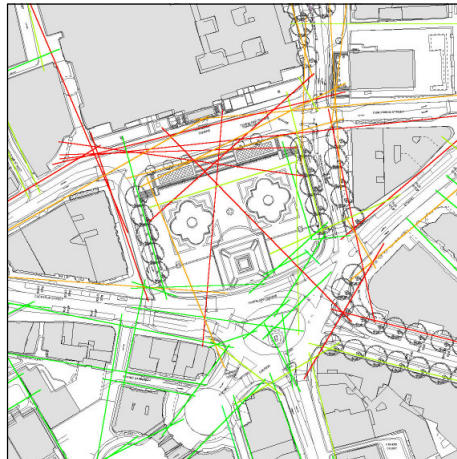
D
Current pedestrian
activity in the Square,
from observation study
(red dots - stationary
pedestrians, blue lines -
walking)

E
Current accessibility



C

D



E