Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?

Mayfair and Belgravia are celebrated internationally as two of the finest locations in London in which to live and work. They are defined by a rich and historic fabric dating from the 1700s and display many examples of period buildings of exceptional quality and heritage value as well as more recent examples of buildings of outstanding architectural merit. They have played an important part in the development of our city.

However, London has become dominated by its traffic, and suffers not only from congestion and pollution, but from the adverse visual effects that traffic infrastructure brings to the quality of its streets and public spaces. London’s historic areas have also experienced this intrusion. Whilst retaining the many fundamentals of high architectural and urban quality long associated with them, Mayfair and Belgravia have not been immune to the adverse effects which the car has introduced.

Grosvenor continues to proactively respond to these challenges which Mayfair and Belgravia face today. Prominent among these is the desire to ensure that they retain and enhance their reputation as places which set new standards for urban life through a high quality environment. A key part of this is our aspiration to achieve an appropriate balance between pedestrians and vehicles. Delivering high quality streets and spaces which fulfil the needs of all users of the public realm is our vision, but recognising that places are for people and that traffic should play a complementary role in that vision and not a dominant one.

However, there are many ‘guardians’ involved in making the streets of our cities what they are. From individual users and building occupiers, to developers, utility companies, statutory authorities, highway engineers and, of course, land owners. All these bodies have a significant individual and cumulative impact upon the quality of our streets and spaces – our public realm. Unfortunately, it is often all too easy for them to consider and focus upon their own individual activities and impacts upon our streets rather than seeking a co-ordinated approach to today’s urban challenges.

This Public Realm Handbook presents a set of design standards that promotes consistency across the Estates of Mayfair and Belgravia, seeking in the long term to achieve a higher quality and coherent public realm in these neighbourhoods. Improved management and co-ordinated design of our streets and spaces is fundamental to achieving a higher quality public realm. It is our sincere hope that the Public Realm Handbook will help all of us with an interest in the public realm to address this issue, and to work together to make Mayfair and Belgravia better places for people once again, and of which we can all be proud.
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Particular thanks is given to Chris Mason, Policy Manager (City Schemes), at Westminster City Council.

**Acknowledgements**
The Team would also like to express their thanks to the officers at Westminster City Council and staff at Grosvenor for their continued interest and assistance.

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**TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS:**

Technical Specifications for materials proposed within the estates are provided on Grosvenor’s internet website.

[www.grosvenorpublicrealm.co.uk](http://www.grosvenorpublicrealm.co.uk).
Fig. C2. Mayfair and Belgravia location plan (© Google Earth)
PART ONE: Introduction and Context

1.1 Introduction

Vision
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1.2 Context

The Mayfair and Belgravia Estates
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1.1 Introduction

The Grosvenor Estates of Mayfair and Belgravia are two of the finest locations in London. Steeped in history, carefully planned and managed over the centuries by Grosvenor, the Estates continue to attract high accolades for their architectural beauty, quality and rich heritage. Grosvenor recognises its responsibility to continue to perform its stewardship role, and to fulfil this through an approach which seeks improvement and continuous enhancement of the Estates for the benefit of those who live and work within them or who visit them.

Part of this process lies with embracing the contemporary and long term challenges which the Estates face today - proactively addressing them in a way which not only conserves their architectural, social and economic integrity, but also improves their environment and the experience of being there. Yet it must also create opportunity for imagination and innovation, the outcome of which will be a successful addition to the patina of historical development on the Estates which has evolved over time.

Our firm desire and vision is to ensure that the Estates retain, indeed regain and enhance, the human scale which lies at their heart. This is part of the challenge we face today - a result of the wider imbalance in priority currently accorded to the convenient movement of motor vehicles rather than pedestrians in our cities. The institutional philosophy which seems to promulgate this imbalance is increasingly being challenged. Particularly as our cities increasingly bear witness to the problems of congestion, pollution and safety (not to mention visual intrusion and community isolation) which have been caused by a combination of the saturation of our streets by motor vehicles and an overindulgence in accommodating them as they encroach upon pedestrian space.

Our vision and innovation in proactively responding to this challenge are becoming increasingly well known and recognised. This Public Realm Handbook is a key element in the realisation of that vision. Our aspiration is that it will play a fundamental part in helping Grosvenor, working with our partners and everyone who has an interest in the Estates, deliver our vision in a physical form on the streets and spaces of Mayfair and Belgravia.

Fig 1.1.1
Generously proportioned white stucco houses enclose Eaton Square, one of three garden squares in Belgravia, built by the Grosvenor family in the 19th Century.

Fig 1.1.2
Peaceful and characterful Mews, like Eaton Mews in Belgravia, provide desirable residential locations.

Fig 1.1.3
Red brick and decoration helps to characterise Duke Street in Mayfair.
Introduction

Vision

Mayfair and Belgravia have considerable potential for once again setting new standards for urban life in London. Creativity and improved management of their streets and spaces can achieve a more interesting public realm, a higher quality of urban environment and a stronger identity. At the heart of this is our vision to achieve a proper balance between pedestrians and vehicles, with priority accorded to pedestrians.

This approach is not about the exclusion of traffic from Mayfair and Belgravia, but about recognising that places and streets are for people and that traffic should play a complementary role in that vision and not a dominant one. We recognise that creating high quality public spaces is about more than just addressing traffic issues and we seek to achieve our vision by once more recreating Mayfair and Belgravia as Places for People.

Purpose of the Handbook

This Public Realm Handbook follows on from the strategy prepared by Grosvenor and Gehl Architects - “Places for People: Public Realm Strategy for Mayfair and Belgravia”, 2007. The strategy sets out a series of principles and advice for improving the quality of the public realm on the Estates. This handbook develops and expands upon these principles and presents detailed guidance as to how they may actually take shape on the ground in terms of physical implementation.

There are a range of circumstances in which development interventions in the public realm on the Estates may occur, including:

- Property development schemes advanced by Grosvenor which necessitate works to the public realm.
- Property development schemes advanced by other developers or property companies.
- Property schemes being undertaken by occupiers on the Estates which may also require works to the public realm.
- Streetworks or other schemes advanced by statutory authorities.
- Infrastructure works by utility companies or providers.
- Grosvenor’s own proposals for improvements to the public realm.

Fig 1.1.4
The public realm can be enhanced through the promotion of outdoor shopping and dining.

Fig 1.1.5
A place for people - events or trading can animate the public realm and make places all the more memorable.

Fig 1.1.6
Lighting can add a new dimension to the public realm and its enclosing building during hours of darkness.
Introduction

The impact upon the public realm of a variety of property development projects from a range of different sources over time could potentially be a negative one. Differences in approach, design, appearance and materials can result from such circumstances, potentially leading to a resultant loss in the overall quality of the environment.

The Handbook has been developed in close liaison with Westminster City Council and represents Grosvenor’s view of best practice with regard to works to the public realm on the Estates, whether these be large scale or minor interventions. It presents a high standard of quality for the public realm which schemes should seek to achieve as a minimum. It also seeks to achieve a consistency in approach (strategic and detailed) across the Estates to help deliver our vision.

Westminster City Council has prepared its own public realm handbook (the “Westminster Way”) which sets out guidance for the City as a whole. The intention of the Public Realm Handbook for Mayfair and Belgravia is not to replace the Westminster Way, but to complement it. It sets out Grosvenor’s view of how the Westminster Way, supplemented by the Mayfair and Belgravia Public Realm Handbook, could be used together to help deliver our vision of creating Better Places for People in Mayfair and Belgravia.

Grosvenor is working closely with Westminster City Council on a series of long-term public realm improvement projects in Mayfair and Belgravia. The Handbook is also intended to provide a design context and guidance for the evolution and development of these schemes to ensure consistency in approach and mutual complementarity, and that other schemes are also consistent with our vision. It seeks to ensure that all public realm schemes take account of the range of public spaces, places and streets across the Estates, their particular functions (or variety of functions) within the Estates and the relative degree of appropriate attention which each should receive within an overall urban design hierarchy.

Performance, art, water, high quality materials and light can enhance and contribute to the distinctive character of Mayfair and Belgravia and improve the everyday experiences of those who work, visit and reside in the Estates.
Introduction

How to Use the Handbook

This Public Realm Handbook has been structured to ensure that it can be read as a single coherent narrative or can simply be referred to for specific information as and when required.

Part 1 - Introduction and Context. Provides background information on Mayfair and Belgravia, describes our vision, and explains the purpose and status of the handbook. Part 1 also defines what is meant by the Public Realm and sets out the historical context of each estate.

Part 2 - Design Approach. Describes the way in which the handbook relates to current best practice guidance and sets out an estate strategy under the headings of walking, driving, parking, cycling, activities, identity, visual environment, lighting, sustainability and engagement.

Part 3 - Design Guidance. Provides strategic and detailed design guidance under the headings of Access and Movement, Ground Surfacing, Street Furniture, Orientation and Signage, Lighting, Planting, Arts, Water Features, Events and Activities, Street Trading, Management and Maintenance and Sustainability.

Technical specifications are provided on Grosvenor's web site www.grosvenorpublicrealm.co.uk. These provide technical information on specific public realm components including surfacing materials, signage, lighting and street furniture.

What is the Public Realm?

“Public Realm” is a term often used in the context of urban design, streets and public spaces. It is not, however, one that is recognisable outside professional spheres. The Greater London Authority has put forward a straightforward definition:

“This is the space between and within buildings that are publicly accessible, including streets, squares, forecourts, parks and open spaces.”

This Handbook also deals with areas of Private Realm. Private Realm is privately owned space that may be visible from the Public Realm.
Historical Context

1.2 Context

In this section we set out the context and historical development of the Mayfair and Belgravia Estates, including the planning designation of conservation areas and listed buildings, and a commentary on the public realm.

The narrative within section 1.2 of this Handbook draws reference from the following documents:

- General Information Leaflet: Belgravia Conservation Area 23, Department of Planning and City Development Development Planning Services May 2004, City of Westminster.
- General Information Leaflet: Mayfair Conservation Area 11, Department of Planning and City Development Development Planning Services May 2004, City of Westminster.
- Survey of London volume 39, F. H. W. Sheppard (General Editor) (1977), British History Online.
- Old and New London: Volume 5, Edward Walford (1878) British History Online.
- Old and New London: Volume 4, Edward Walford (1878), British History Online.

The Mayfair and Belgravia Estates

Mayfair and Belgravia form a key part of the City of Westminster and of London. Collectively they are defined by a rich and historic fabric which dates from the 1700s and they contain many period buildings of exceptional quality and heritage value. There are also more recent examples of buildings of outstanding architectural merit present on the Estates.

Recognising that perceptions of streets and spaces are informed by all that people can see, use and enjoy (including the buildings that enclose the public realm and adjacent private space), Mayfair and Belgravia are considered to possess a high quality environment and to be two of the finest locations in London. These perceptions are very much guided by the spatial composition of each estate, their rich heritage and the quality of their buildings, businesses and mix of uses. Indeed Mayfair is described in Mayfair London’s website as having ‘beautiful squares and parks’ and being ‘an amazing place to live work and visit’ and Belgravia is described in Belgravia Life as being ‘a beautiful place to visit or stay in, shop, eat or drink’.

Fig 1.2.1
A view across C. Stanley Peach’s 1905 baroque style sub-station towards King’s Weigh House Church.

Fig 1.2.2
A view across Grosvenor Square in Mayfair, a public park managed by the Royal Parks.

Fig 1.2.3
A view across Eaton Square, in Belgravia, a residential garden square managed by the Grosvenor Estate.
Historical Context

Mayfair’s Historical Context

The layout and design of the streets, spaces and public realm of Mayfair is primarily derived from the influence that ground landlords had in leasing and building, primarily under the direction of Sir Thomas Grosvenor who acquired large tracts of land in the early 1720s. Berkeley Square and its surrounding streets were in different ownership and had been laid out in 1675, as were plots fronting Park Lane and parts of Deanery and Titey Streets.

The Crown and Westminster Abbey retained control of further tracts of land in the locale. The ground landlords set out the lines of the streets and squares, and controlled building form, including architectural design and height.

Whilst Mayfair and Belgravia are understood to possess high quality streets and spaces, this perception is not reflected in the quality of surfacing, furniture and other materials utilised within the public realm. All of these components and the way in which they are employed ought to better reflect the quality of both estates.

Those undertaking work within the estates should seek to ensure that their work contributes to the estates becoming as well known for the quality of their public realm as they are for the quality of their heritage, occupants and buildings.

Fig 1.2.4
Extract from John Rocque’s map of 1746 showing Mayfair’s distinctive grid street layout centred around Grosvenor Square.

Fig 1.2.5
No. 66 Brook Street in 1973.

Fig 1.2.6
Nos. 139–140 Park Lane, from west in 1968 showing the increased use of road signs and guard rails, and a more cluttered public realm where motor vehicles and pedestrians are clearly separated.

All images from Survey of London volume 39, F. H. W. Sheppard (General Editor) (1977), British History Online.
Historical Context

Thomas Barlow’s original layout of the wider Mayfair Estate is recognised for its disciplined, straightforward planning and comprises grids of straight streets with grand places at their centre. There are three distinct areas; the first based on, and around, Grosvenor Square and Hanover Square, the second based on Berkeley Square and the third based on the line of the east end of Piccadilly. It appears that the prime influence on configuration was the composition of buildings, with the distribution of traffic a secondary factor.

The layout is characterised by a disregard for irregular boundary lines, natural features and topography, and is primarily informed by land ownership. This is evidenced by the many haphazard junctions between roads and the complete concealment of former features, including the line of the Tyburn River.

Mayfair’s Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings

Significant parts of Mayfair were designated as a Conservation Area in 1969. The conservation area was extended in 1974, 1979 and again in 1990 and now includes the majority of the estate.

There are almost 700 listed buildings in the Mayfair Conservation Area (not all within Grosvenor ownership). Of these, 44 are listed Grade II* and 14 are listed Grade I.

Most of Mayfair’s Squares are protected by the London Squares Act of 1931. Grosvenor Square is a registered Historic Park and Garden and is managed by the Royal Parks.

The area due east of Binney Street (between Binney Street, Woodstock Street and 100m due south of Oxford Street) forms part of the Tyburn Settlement Area of Special Archaeological priority.

Belgravia’s Historical Context

Belgravia was named after the Village of Belgrave in Cheshire, a village on land in the ownership of the Grosvenor Family.

The Masterplan, which was agreed in 1811, was characterised by its uniformity and rectangular grid configuration (set out southwest to northeast) of streets and related squares and gardens.
The design and planning of Belgravia differed to that of Mayfair, with the Estate Surveyors, principally Thomas Cundy I, II and III, being charged with the power to consider and approve plans for any new buildings or redevelopments undertaken by leaseholders who were given more design freedom. This approach came to influence the later redevelopment of the Mayfair Estate.

**Belgravia’s Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings**

Significant parts of Belgravia have Conservation Area status. Most streets, spaces and buildings are covered by the City of Westminster’s Belgravia Conservation Area, other areas are covered by designations in Kensington and Chelsea and around Victoria.

There are approximately 500 listed buildings in Belgravia. Whilst most are listed Grade II, for either their group or individual value, 41 of the 49 properties around Belgrave Square are listed Grade I. Belgravia’s churches are of particular interest with St Peter’s of Eaton Square, listed Grade II* and St Michael’s of Chester Square and St Mary’s of Bourne Street, listed Grade II.

Of the Squares and Gardens within Belgravia, Belgrave Square, Chesham Place, Chester Square, Eaton Square and Wilton Crescent are protected by the London Squares Act of 1931, Belgrave Square and Eaton Square are Grade II Registered Historic Parks and Gardens.

**The Public Realm in Mayfair and Belgravia**

Although the two estates have many positive assets and qualities, they both display some of the adverse characteristics frequently found in many cities today, especially the priority given to vehicular traffic over pedestrians. This is a symptom of a problem endemic throughout London.

London has become dominated by its traffic. The Capital suffers not only from congestion and pollution, but from the adverse visual effects the traffic infrastructure brings to the quality of its public spaces. The car, both moving and stationary, has displaced people, creating environments that are less safe, noisier, more polluted, visually unattractive and that put people second. London is a city which has given priority to the car over the pedestrian on too many occasions and in too many areas (Places for People: Public Realm Strategy for Mayfair and Belgravia, 2007).

This is an issue that is recognised within Part 1 of the Westminster UDP. Strategic policies STRA 20 – 25 aim to reduce the ‘need to travel while ensuring safe, accessible, sustainable and convenient travel by integrating land use and transport policies’.

It is also clear that many of London’s historic areas also suffer from this intrusion. Even though Mayfair and Belgravia continue to retain the many fundamentals of the high environmental quality long associated with them, they have not been immune to the adverse effects which the car has introduced. The cumulative effects, over many years, that have become ingrained in the street fabric of Mayfair and Belgravia are there to be seen. The Estates were designed and laid out long before the advent of the motor vehicle. They were built at a time when streets and spaces had a social and commercial purpose as well as movement and accessibility functions. They took account of this, as well as being designed and built at a time when vehicles were much slower, less polluting, fewer in number and therefore did not require the significant proliferation of signage and controlling infrastructure which prevails today.