

Wake up, Soho

FORTY YEARS AGO when large sections of Soho were under threat from speculative office development it was the Soho Society that campaigned for Soho Square, Dean, Frith and Greek Streets to be made a conservation area.

Over the years this has enabled small businesses, and particularly restaurants, to flourish.

The Soho Society, which endeavours to make Soho a better place in which to live, trade and visit, has discovered that Soho now faces a new threat, which as yet does not seem to be fully realised by the trading and residential population in this conservation area of the Soho village.

The Soho Society draws your attention to Crossrail's forthcoming activity in Soho Square and surrounding streets during 2012 - a crucial trading year given the anticipated influx of visitors to the Olympics and the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations.

Are you aware that visitors in 2012 will discover: four holes of about 4.5 metres wide drilled into the road to prepare for the sinking of grout shafts, one approximately in each corner of the Square? Each grout shaft will be surrounded by a hoarding providing working space for contractors (serviced by heavy vehicles) to excavate 18 metres down into the earth beneath the Square.

Are you aware how long this disturbance will last? Will it be for

months or years?

Is all this necessary? From an engineering point of view the answer is yes, for cement grout infused into the ground beneath the Square will stabilise the earth and prevent subsidence to the buildings around the Square as Crossrail drives through its new tunnels and work is completed on the construction of the new Tottenham Court Road tube station.

One thing is certain - whatever the authorities may say, the heart of Soho will for some considerable time not appear as described in the travel guides. Regular visitors to local restaurants and bars and those who lunch and rest on the Square's lawns will certainly notice a difference.

To minimise the blight to Soho's famous square, and maybe to your business, the Soho Society intends to press those involved to pursue a well thought out sensitive and enlightened policy.

Confrontation is not what is required, but co-operation, between those who are carrying out the construction work and those who make their living in, or live in, Soho.

There are many factors that could affect you. For instance, are you aware of the following:

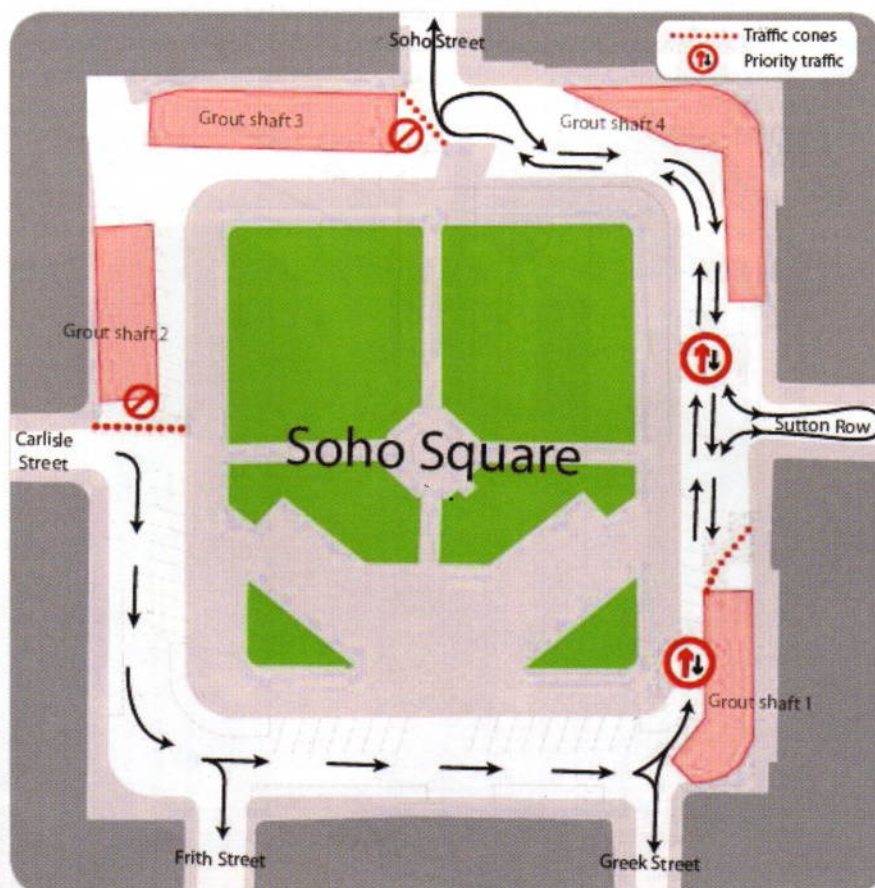
Hours of construction work

For how many months or years will the disturbance continue?

How many days a week will construction work be carried out?

During the period of the Olympics, how can disturbance be minimised?

What route will the construction lorries that service the grout shafts take and how many a day will make their way up Dean Street when grouting begins?



Crossrail Soho Square Traffic Management Plan during grout shaft construction works

We would like steps to be taken to decorate the hoardings around the grout shafts in the Square – for example, to tell the story of Soho and Soho village, past, present and future, and to know who will pay and maintain it. The Soho Society and Museum of Soho could easily provide the text and images required.

Who is responsible for the trees and who will replace them if they die?

Where will the parking places lost in the Square be relocated?

What thought has been given to improvements to the Square once the grout shafts have been removed?

Who will pay for it?

The improvements to Fitzroy Square in Fitzrovia are a good example of what can be done.

Those who attended the recent meeting of Crossrail Tottenham Court Road liaison group were left in no doubt as to the skill and ability of those who are constructing this new facility for London. Nor were they left in any doubt of the serious and inevitable disturbance to Soho Square and surrounding streets, and those who live and trade there.

In response to the concerns vigorously expressed by the Soho Society and others, Westminster Councillor Jonathan Glanz, who chaired the liaison meeting, suggested a meeting between Crossrail, the Soho Society, and other interested parties to look at ways to address the negative effect on the well being of this part of Soho.

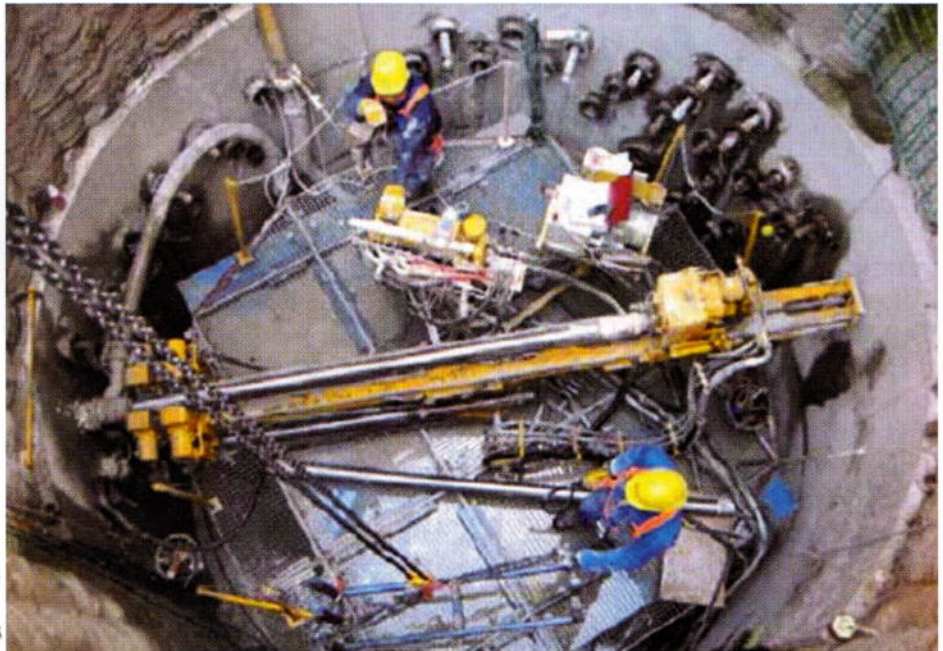
The Soho Society will vigorously pursue all these and other matters and if you are not a member of the Society we very much hope you will consider joining and working with the Society to protect all our interests.

It is very much in your interest and we urge you to attend or send a representative to Crossrail's next meeting on 16th February 2012 at the Bloomsbury Baptist Church, 235 Shaftesbury Avenue (opposite the Shaftesbury Theatre). The meeting is at 6.30pm. Please call Martine Monks at Crossrail on 020 3229 9768 to confirm your attendance. You can watch our website for further updates.

LESLIE HARDCASTLE OBE,
PRESIDENT, SOHO SOCIETY
KAYE DE VILLE,
CHAIR, SOHO SOCIETY



Soho Square will be severely disrupted during the work. Below: a typical grout shaft



sohoSNIPPETS

THE STATUE OF CHARLES II, erected at the centre of Soho Square in 1731 where the mock-Tudor pavilion now stands, was once surrounded by a pool and fountains. The water was piped from a site somewhere between the north end of Rathbone Place and Windmill street. A windmill stood there and operated as a water pump. The gentle slope of the land between the windmill and the fountains suggests that the water jets reached only a modest height.

ROGER HARRIS

