Oxford Street ‘curse’ appears to be lifting as American candy store numbers fall

T
he number of candy stores on Oxford Street has fallen from a peak of 29 to 21 after a crackdown by Westminster council.

The proliferation of the tacky “American-style” shops has been seen as symbolic of the street’s decline after the departure of major names including Debenhams, House of Fraser and Topshop.

But a report this week by the Labour-run council’s overview and scrutiny committee suggests that enforcement action is starting to have an impact.

The report said: “We have ramped up the pressure on Candy stores, souvenir and vape shops, to make clear the status quo is not acceptable. Following multiple attempts to engage with each freeholder and long leaseholder, requesting that they do all they can stop letting agents leasing empty properties to candy stores or souvenir shops, we then carried out a transparency release of those who failed to engage positively with the council.

“This exercise triggered a number of conversations with freeholders and long leaseholders on the specific actions that could help to remove candy stores in their particular contractual situations, and those conversations are ongoing, with some parties even inviting trading standards action to enable them to begin legal action against their tenants.”

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Westminster leader Adam Hug said: "We have energetically pursued unscrupulous traders who sell unsafe or fake goods, impounding more than £1million of items in 18 months."

He added that the candy stores "form part of a sophisticated operation which is skilled at exploiting UK legal loopholes"

The number of shops had fallen to 21 before, only to rebound to 29, as the council has increasingly played "whack-a-mole" with new stores that open up soon after others are shut down.

Hug has claimed the stores have cost taxpayers at least £8 million in unpaid business rates.