

#OpenOrmeau

24 July 2020

The Beginning...

What is now called Open Ormeau started as a personal response to the #OurChangedPlaceNI initiative – a way of gathering ideas through social media from as many people as possible about the changes they would like to see to their neighbourhood during this COVID-19 period using the hashtag #OurChangedPlaceNI.

On 5 June 2020 Ciarán Fox, a local resident, posted a series of tweets exploring an idea for the weekend closure of a part of the Ormeau Road that would allow the high density of bars, restaurants and cafes to expand out into the road.

Following an enormously positive response to the idea online Ciarán posted a 4 page proposal (see Appendix 1) on 16 June 2020 which considered some of the practicalities, sought to confirm support or otherwise from the community/businesses and proposed some next steps.

This generated an even larger response and resulted in a wide range of people in the Ormeau community coming forward to support the initiative and volunteer their time to progress the plan. The Ballynafeigh Community Development Association, the Ormeau churches and a range of other local charities expressed their support soon after.

A very significant wave of community activism started – with over 240 local residents offering to volunteer their time and skills.

Extensive community engagement

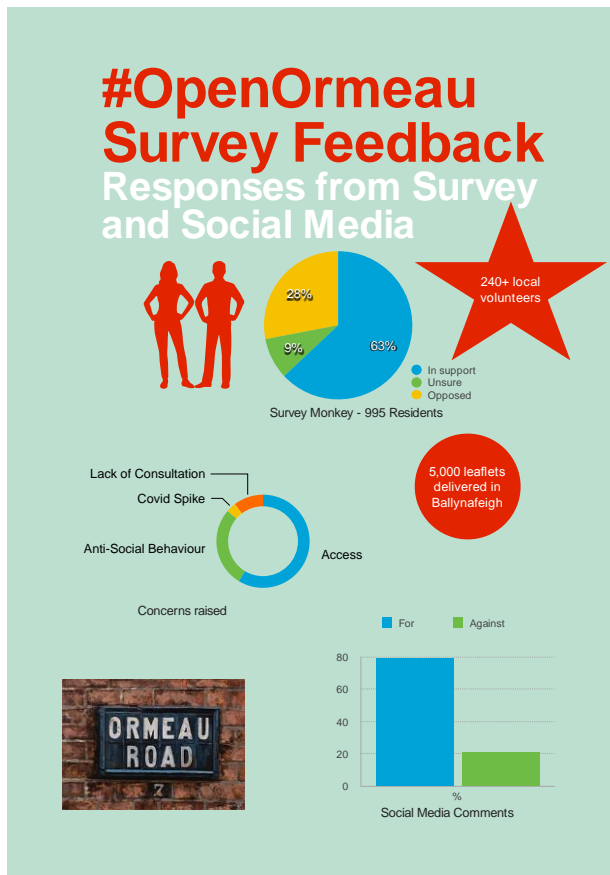
As a result, there has been an unprecedented level of engagement with the original Open Ormeau proposal across the local community. Understanding, listening and responding to the views of local residents and businesses has been the central task over the last few weeks.

There was a lot of feedback online via Twitter, Nextdoor and a newly established Open Ormeau Facebook page but we were conscious that many residents and businesses might not find out about the idea if it only existed online. By the 6 July, the dedicated team of volunteers had already designed, produced and delivered leaflets about Open Ormeau to over 5000 households and business in the area. The leaflet gave a range of ways for people to share their views on the proposal, both online and offline.

Given the Covid restrictions, large public meetings were out of the question, so we held three public Zoom meetings for residents and businesses. We also met with a number of residents in small groups to discuss the idea and their concerns in detail. Businesses were emailed and direct personal contact was made where possible.

The final element of community engagement was through an online survey which was promoted widely.

We have also engaged with local politicians, Belfast City Council, the Department for Infrastructure, Translink, the Police Service and the Department for Communities to discuss some of the practicalities and to understand what might be possible.



What we heard

Survey: There were 995 response to the survey, 78% of which were from Ballynaveigh residents. 63% are in favour, 8% unsure, and 28% opposed to the initiative as they understand it in its current form.

We also took note of all comments via Facebook and Nextdoor. The social media analysis was slightly more favourable than the survey results. With a majority supporting but an active minority expressing opposition on multiple points.

The greatest concern was around access (including parking outside businesses and worries about parking in residential streets), followed by worries about antisocial behaviour including the potential for noise, drunkenness, litter, and lack of toilet provisions. Concerns about a Covid-19 spike due to increased visitors to the area were expressed by 1% of respondents and lack of consultation expressed by 3%.

Business

The feedback from businesses was more mixed. In general, bars and restaurants were supportive, take-away businesses were concerned about delivery/pick-up access, some retailers were against due to concerns about loss of trade from people in cars. Some concerns (for example anti-social behaviour) overlapped with those of neighbours. However, businesses were also worried about interruption to their normal routines and access in terms of deliveries, customers parking nearby, take-away drivers and the critical nature for many of their weekend trade. Some believed their businesses are highly dependent on customers who drive to/through the area.

Why not just do nothing?...

Because...



At a number of points along the road there isn't sufficient space, particularly at busy times, to socially distance whilst walking. This is likely to get worse as more businesses become active again.

Photo: Squeeze on walking space from car parking bays, lampposts and outdoor seating areas.

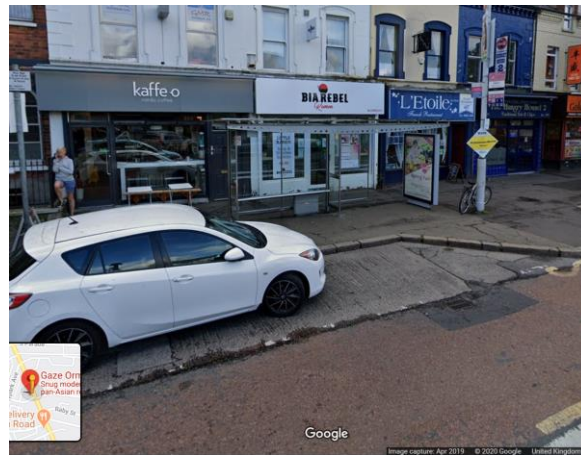


Photo: Squeeze on space from presence of parking bay which forces bus shelter back into the pavement



Photo: Squeeze on pedestrian space from car parking bays and outdoor trading.



People are queuing which increases pressure on walking space. This is likely to get worse as more businesses become active again. This is a particular problem for people with visual impairments, wheelchair users or anyone with reduced mobility as well as families with buggies.

Photo: Queues for businesses squeeze space and this is before all businesses are back operating



It is not particularly safe or welcoming for people to cycle on this stretch of road. It is particularly difficult at busy times when the shared cycle/bus lane is blocked by double-parked cars which forces cyclists into the car lane.

Photo: Double parking forces people cycling into the car lane

- The risk of transmission of COVID-19 is lower outdoors than it is indoors and therefore people have an increased desire for outdoor socialising
- It is difficult for the cafes, restaurants, and bars on the road to re-open in a sustainable way when they are required to operate at significantly reduced capacity (about 50%). People want to see all the bars, cafes and restaurants open and make it through this difficult economic period.
- People like to be able to shop and socialise without always having the noise and fumes in the air from lots of vehicles. People prefer to breathe clean air. This desire is heightened when people want to reduce transmission risk by staying outdoors in places which are more public.
- Regardless of any reallocation of road space, the cafes, bars and restaurants will still want to re-open and apply for pavement licenses to meet the needs of their customers who want to sit outside. This will place an additional squeeze on pedestrian space especially at weekends.

Now that we have listened...

The engagement with the local community is unprecedented in our experience as neighbours. We don't remember a time when the community was so animated around an idea. Having listened to a range of feedback from a number of sources including businesses, residents, elected representatives and other officials, we are now proposing a new way forward that we believe balances the needs, concerns, hopes and fears of the vast majority of people in the area. The response directly addresses concerns and scales back the scope and duration of any pilot initiative and the risk of any (unintended) negative consequences.

1. Significantly curtail the number of weekends and take trial approach to time slots

- No longer running from 6pm on Friday evening to 11pm on Sunday evening for three months solid. Reduced to three August weekends in a row trialling different time slots to test out the impacts (positive and negative) in a controlled manner:
 - o Sunday 16th 1pm to 10pm
 - o Saturday 22nd 9am to 11pm
 - o Saturday 29th 4pm to 11pm and Sunday 30th all day until 11pm
 - o Possible bonus evening on a Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday in August to help restaurants take advantage of the 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme

2. Maintain car access and short-term shop-front parking provision

- Provide vehicle access to the full Ormeau road from either end for anyone who needs it during the three trials periods
- Provide parking right beside business premises for delivery drivers and people calling in for collections or making quick purchases. Achieved by allocating one lane to parking outside those business that require it.

3. Use trial to help inform one weekend in September

- In parallel with the August trial slots we propose the start of a formal consultation, led by the Council with the support of the Department for Infrastructure, on how best to address the spatial challenges on this stretch of the Ormeau Road on one full weekend in September (Saturday and Sunday only). The trial slots in August would be an important part of the consultation.

4. Other key points:

- Side streets. Signage road closed resident access only
- As well as parking within the area with increased space for pedestrians there will be no decrease in parking provision for businesses outside this area.
- The area with increased space for pedestrians has been slightly reduced from what was originally envisaged. It is now proposed to run from Bread and Banjo to the Parador. However, if businesses would like it to be extended for the trial slots this could be easily accommodated. This will make moving on the road safer for visually impaired residents, wheelchair users or anyone with reduced mobility as well as families with children and buggies or prams.

- Parades will be unaffected. Clashes between days/times of parading and Open Ormeau will be avoided. We are not aware of any current applications for parades that would clash with the proposed August trial slots.
- All communications in relation to the trial periods of extended space for pedestrians will stress that this is not a street party or festival. There will be no stalls, no drinking in the street, no organised performers etc.
- All food and beverage businesses will be operating table service only.
- Whilst no increase in rubbish is anticipated during the trial slots Council will be asked to increase monitoring of bins to ensure there is no litter problem.

Outline Traffic Arrangements

During the trial periods traffic would be free to access the Ormeau Road coming from the bridge or from the roundabout. However, motorists would be advised that the road was not open for through-traffic.

One lane of traffic would flow in each direction from approximately Fitzwilliam Avenue to halfway between North and South Parade. This would be marked out with cones.

All side streets on the left-hand side going into town from Florenceville Avenue to Deramore Avenue would be closed. This is to allow an uninterrupted walking corridor down the left-hand side of the road and protect visually impaired pedestrians. Access to these streets can be made from Sunnyside Street (residents only).

All other side streets on the left-hand side going into town between the roundabout and the bridge would be resident access only.

All side streets on the right-hand side going into town from Fitzwilliam Avenue to North Parade would be resident access only. Residents of these streets will be encouraged, where possible, to access their street via the Ravenhill Road.

Here are some of the specifics but a formal traffic management plan will need to be put in place by the Department for Infrastructure and Belfast City Council.

- **Annadale Embankment**

City bound motorists approaching the Annadale Avenue junction would be informed that the Ormeau Road is access-only from the roundabout. City bound traffic. Suggested diversion down Annadale Avenue.



- **Ormeau Road/Ravenhill Road roundabout**

City bound motorists approaching the Ormeau Road/Ravenhill Road roundabout would be informed that the Ormeau Road is access-only from the roundabout. City bound traffic diverted down Ravenhill Road.



- **Ormeau bridge**

Country bound motorists approaching the Ormeau bridge would be informed that the Ormeau Road is access-only from the bridge to the roundabout. Country bound traffic diverted down Annadale Embankment and Ormeau Embankment.



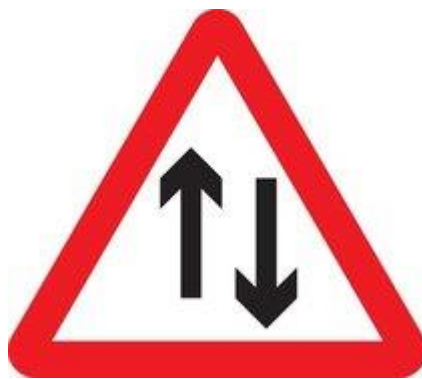
- **Approaching the Parador Lodge**

City bound motorists on the Ormeau Road approaching the Parador Lodge would be informed that city bound lanes are closed and the next section of road is:

- Cycle priority
- 10mph
- Two way single-lane traffic
- Access only



<https://www.alamy.com/cyclists-have-priority-safe-cycling-sign-directing-cars-to-give-way-image156840669.html>



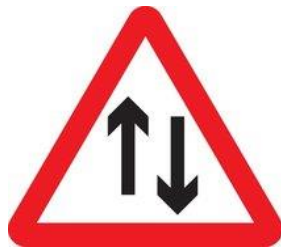
- **Approaching Bread and Banjo**

Country bound motorists on the Ormeau Road approaching the Bread and Banjo would be informed that county bound lanes are being reduced to a single lane and the next section of road is:

- Cycle priority
- 10mph
- Two way single-lane traffic
- Access only



<https://www.alamy.com/cyclists-have-priority-safe-cycling-sign-directing-cars-to-give-way-image156840669.html>



- **All side streets on the left-hand side going into town from Florenceville Avenue to Deramore Avenue**

All side streets on the left-hand side going into town from Florenceville Avenue to Deramore Avenue would be closed. This is to allow an uninterrupted walking corridor down the left-hand side of the road and protects visually impaired pedestrians.



- **All side streets on the right-hand side going into town from Fitzwilliam Avenue to North Parade and the remaining streets on the left-hand side**

All side streets on the right-hand side going into town from Fitzwilliam Avenue to North Parade would be resident access only. Residents of these streets will be encouraged, where possible, to access their street via the Ravenhill Road.

Other than the stretch identified in the previous bullet point, all other side streets on the left-hand side going into town between the roundabout and the bridge would be resident access only.



<https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-street-sign-road-closed-resident-access-only-130792491.html>

- **Somerset Street, Parkmore Street and Raby Street**

Somerset Street, Parkmore Street and Raby Street are one-way streets or cul-de-sacs so residential traffic will be emerging into the two-way traffic. Drivers will be notified of the two-way flow with signage.

- **Rushfield Avenue**

A turning circle at the bottom of Rushfield Avenue will be marked out to allow these residents to turn so that they do not have to reverse back up the street.



- **Sunnyside Street at Annadale Embankment**

Drivers approaching Sunnyside Street at Annadale Embankment/Kings Bridge will be informed that there is no through road but access is open.



Sally Abernethy, Martin Carter, Benji Connell, Aaron Dickson, Christopher Ferry, Ciarán Fox, Brenda Heaney, Janet Johnston, Christine Kelly, Joe Kenny, Suzanne Lagan, Colette Leeson, Kerry Lynn, Anne McCambridge, Siobhán McCrystal, Lucy McCutcheon, Kerry Marie Plante, Maggie Smith, Paul Smyth, Christina Taylor, Michelle Warner

#OpenOrmeau

Appendices

Appendix 1

Open Ormeau

16 June 2020

In response to the [#OurChangedPlaceNI](#) initiative which is calling on everyone to post on social media ideas for the changes they would like to see to their area, I posted an idea on twitter for the weekend closure of a part of the Ormeau Road that would allow the high density of bars, restaurants, cafes to expand out into the road.

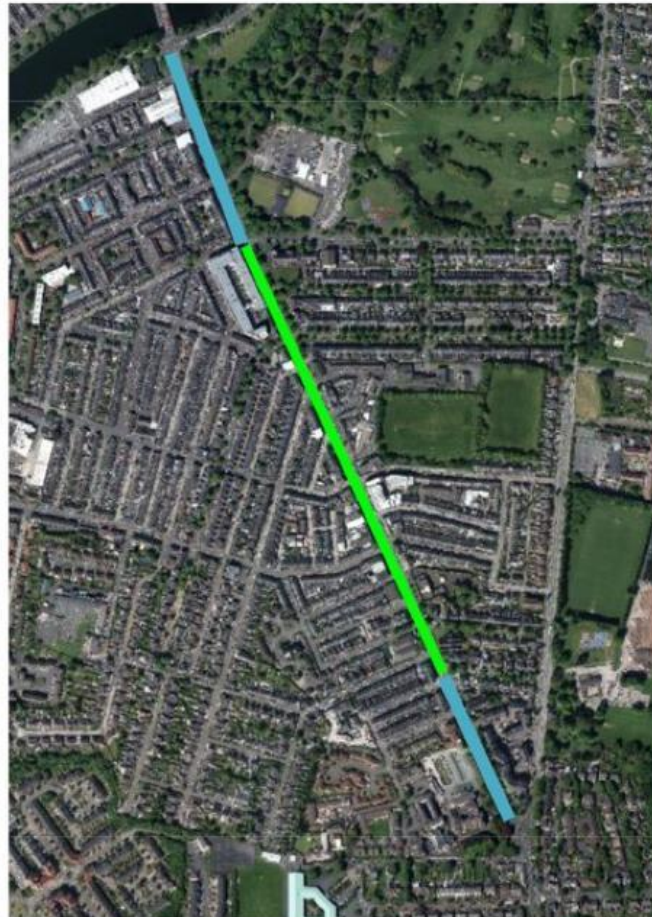
The idea has generated lots of positive reaction with support from the community and local businesses. Representatives from [all of the main political parties](#) in the area have supported the further exploration of the idea. Some very valid concerns have been raised by residents about access, diverted traffic, parking and buses.

Following news yesterday that restaurants, bars and cafes will be allowed to open for table service from 3rd July it feels like the right time to expand the proposal, consider some practicalities, confirm support or otherwise from the community/businesses and set out next steps.

From now to 3rd July is 18 days. [That's](#) a big day challenge. But extraordinary times require extraordinary measures at an extraordinary pace.

I hope this process can help encourage people to bring ideas forward for other areas of Belfast and in towns and villages across Northern Ireland. Change is needed. [Let's](#) make the best of it.

[#OpenOrmeau](#)



- Traffic coming into the city down the Ormeau Road could be redirected at the Ormeau/Annadale junction and at the Ormeau/Ravenhill roundabout.
 - Create buffer zones from Ormeau bridge to Park Road and Parador to Ormeau/Ravenhill Roundabout for taxi drop off/pick up, take-a-way pick up etc.
 - Continued vehicle access to Park Road recycling centre
 - Zebra crossing added at Ravenhill for crossing at Cherryvale Park (maybe not ready from outset)
3. Vehicle access to open zone
- Emergency vehicle access to be maintained at all times
 - Access for blue badge holders to be maintained at all times (but not for through travel)
 - Access for residents of streets that have no other access point to be maintained at all times (NB. One-way streets)
 - Access for deliveries/essential business services to be agreed with the businesses
 - Access for buses to be agreed with Translink
4. Buses
- Options to be discussed and agreed with Translink
 - Current thinking – allow metro buses to travel through the open zone but co-ordinate timetable or make arrangement to ensure inward/outward buses are never passing through the open zone at the same time. Ulsterbus services could be redirected.
 - Consideration needs to be given to bus access to the raised kerbs at bus stops
 - Important to note that public transport usage is currently suppressed
 - 5 or 10 mph speed limit
5. Weather
- Agree a protocol with businesses/community for dealing with bad weather. Perhaps call off if persistent bad weather is forecast for a particular weekend.
6. Protecting residents from unwanted traffic/parking
- During Open Ormeau periods all streets off Ormeau Road from Ormeau/Ravenehill roundabout to Ormeau Bridge to be designated as resident access only (includes visitors, deliveries etc to residents) from all entrances. This would avoid traffic attempting to cut through and reduce risk of a surge of on street parking. Sunnyside Street to be designated as resident access only from embankment/kings bridge entry point.
7. Parking
- People should be encouraged not to drive to the area but to walk/cycle
 - Cycle parking needs considered. Could form part of two ends of the open zone.
 - If no driving message wasn't working or if resident concerns were high, park and walk provisions could be explored at Cherryvale, O-Zone, Queen's PEC, Holy Rosary etc.
-

- Designated parking for blue badge holders (should be much more space available than normal)
 - All Ormeau streets accessible from Ravenhill, Embankment or Sunnyside designated as resident parking only (includes guests of residents).
8. Take Away businesses
- Buffer zones at either end of the Open Zone could be used for people picking up take aways. Short walk to a number of existing take away businesses and businesses offering take away during lockdown.
 - Encourage use of delivery (especially by bike)
9. Try, listen, learn, improve
- Natural to have some concerns about possible noise, nuisance, parking issues, access issues etc.
 - Lots of measures can be put in place in advance to address concerns but important that a try, listen, learn and improve approach is taken each weekend.
 - Perhaps more formal review after 4 weekends.
 - Seek feedback from traders (especially those who currently get business from the passing traffic) on impact on trade. Up%. Down%.

Next steps

- Check interest from majority of businesses and other organisations on this section of the Ormeau Road.
- Check support from the majority of residents and wider community
- Request approval in principle from Department for Infrastructure to facilitate the road closure for the Open Ormeau proposal. This would pave the way for discussions on the precise details.
- Request Belfast City Council to:
 - provide flexibility around licensing to allow businesses to serve alcohol within their designated on-street area
 - confirm if there will be any support available to help businesses quickly gear up for opening in an extended outdoor area
 - to confirm if there will be any grant assistance to establish an Ormeau road business forum
- Request support from the Department for Communities from an urban regeneration and neighbourhood renewal perspective.
- Request approval in principle from Translink to amend routes and/or timetables to facilitate the Open Ormeau proposal. This would pave the way for discussions on the precise details.
- Following approvals above, agree and co-ordinate detailed plans with the community and businesses.

Aim of proposal

The aim of this proposal is to overcome the multiple challenges of:

- providing sufficient space for people to walk whilst socially distancing
- providing space for queues outside shops at peak times
- providing space for businesses/organisations, particularly restaurants, cafes and bars to expand outside at weekends from 3rd July so that it is viable for them to open on a table-service-only model whilst upholding social distancing requirements
- providing safe space for local cycling
- ensuring access for all

Core Proposal

Close the Ormeau Road from the Parador to the Park Road junction (the open zone) to most through traffic at the weekends from 3rd July.

Maintain a minimum of two lanes width (5.4m) of open road space along the open zone for walking, cycling and limited vehicle use with a 5 or 10mph speed limit. It would be clearly designated a pedestrian/cycle priority zone.

Bring the businesses/organisations out onto the pavement and road with each participating business/organisation allocated a defined outdoor space to operate by agreement.

Detail

1. Agreed protocol for bars, restaurants, cafes etc
 - Propose bar closure at 11pm
 - Social distancing of tables and table-service-only will naturally limit numbers and noise.
 - Encourage table reservations to reduce queueing
 - Boundary for each business area to be agreed in advance. Address pinch points with businesses operating on both sides of the road.
 - Timings to be agreed
 - Start of weekend road closure and set-up start time
 - Evening overnight clear away time
 - End of weekend full clear away time
 - End of weekend road reopening time
 2. Redirection of general vehicle traffic
 - Traffic coming from city centre up Ormeau Road could be redirected at the Ormeau Bridge to go along the embankment to emerge at Ormeau/Annadale junction or along the embankment toward the Ravenhill Road. This would reduce pressure on Park Road.
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Appendix 2

Dealing with residents' concerns

Resident concern	How concern has been addressed
Access to parking outside businesses	Allowance now made for short-term parking for purchases
Unwanted parking outside residents' homes	Signage to say side streets are closed - for resident access only
Noise	In all "Open Ormeau" communications it will be stressed that "this is not a street party or festival". There will be no stalls or street performers. Bars and restaurants capacity is reduced to around 50%
Drunkenness	There will be no drinking in the street. Bars and restaurants will be providing table service only. Bars and restaurants capacity is reduced to around 50%. PSNI have confirmed they foresee no issues in policing Open Ormeau adequately.
Litter	There is no anticipated increase in rubbish, but BCC will be asked to monitor
Lack of consultation	Over 5000 leaflets delivered, facebook page with 1000 followers, information on Nextdoor, three zoom consultations for businesses (2) and residents (1)
Toilet provision	Businesses will be responsible for providing toilets for customers. There will be no increased capacity for visitors to sit for food or drinks beyond this. Bars and restaurants capacity is reduced to around 50%
Covid spike	By allowing better pedestrianisation of footways, social distancing outside business premises should be improved
Diversion of traffic through other main routes	The reduction in frequency and duration of Open Ormeau will reduce any impact of this, along with reduced traffic at weekends particularly post-covid.

Appendix 3

Dealing with businesses' concerns

Business Concern	How concern has been addressed
Concerns about deliveries/collection from take-aways	Parking accommodated outside take-away businesses to allow for deliveries/collection
Loss of trade from car customers	Access permitted for those who need it. Parking outside premises provided for those business who need it for short term parking for customer collections.
Critical nature of weekend trade	Three shorter trial periods rather than full weekend for three months.
Anti-social behaviour	Some overlap with residents concerns, see table above.

Visualising re-purposed space

Open Ormeau Revised Plan – 24 July 2020
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EXAMPLE 4: Space allocation outside food/beverage businesses that wish to participate in the trial periods on both sides of road

Buildings 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 **Buildings**

CURRENT

Al Gelato

Wine Mark

Site

Old bank

Oasis

Pavilion

District

Abbey

Bank of Ireland

Lane descriptors

1 pavement

2 pavement or car parking bay

3 inside lane city-bound

4 outside lane city-bound

5 inside lane country-bound

6 outside lane country-bound

7 pavement or car parking bay

8 pavement

space for walking

space for parking

city bound traffic

country bound traffic

space for outdoor tables

OPEN ORMEAU

Al Gelato

Wine Mark

Site

Old bank

Oasis

Pavilion

District

Abbey

Bank of Ireland