



CAMDEN CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 7 JANUARY 2026

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

My name is Julia Jevell. I own Choosing Keeping on Tower Street in Covent Garden. I am speaking not only for myself, but on behalf of more than fifteen local businesses, including two theatres, who have signed a joint letter about the impact of dockless e-bikes in this area.

This problem has been ongoing for over two years. During that time, we have written repeatedly to officers and councillors and supplied a large volume of photographic evidence. We have been told enforcement is happening. But the situation on the ground has not improved.

Dockless e-bikes, mainly operated by Lime, are routinely left outside designated bays on Tower Street and Tower Court. They block pavements, crossings, shop entrances and access routes. This happens every day, throughout the day. It is not misuse by a few people. It is the predictable result of placing a high-capacity dockless bike bay in a narrow, high-footfall pedestrian street, which is also the only exit for vehicles out of Seven Dials.

Enforcement has not solved this. Bikes are cleared and then reappear nearly immediately, they spill into Tower Court even by the operator, lining up bikes there. Being repeatedly asked to send photographs does not feel like a solution. It simply confirms that the current model does not work in this location.

There are serious safety issues attached to this. Tower Street and the wider Seven Dials area already experience high levels of crime, including theft, pickpocketing, burglary and drug-related anti-social behaviour. This is well known locally and reflected in regular police activity. Over time, we have gathered extensive photographic evidence showing dockless Lime e-bikes being repeatedly used in connection with suspected criminal activity in Seven Dials. This includes rapid arrival at and departure from locations linked to theft and burglary. This is not a one-off. It is a clear pattern, and the evidence has been shared with the Council.

Dockless e-bikes allow fast, anonymous movement through crowded pedestrian areas and can be abandoned instantly. In a busy environment with limited supervision, that creates conditions which make offending easier. That risk is foreseeable, and it is already being realised. At Christmas, staff were unable to leave our shop because a large group was congregating outside, smoking drugs and behaving in a way that made it feel unsafe to exit. This was not an isolated incident. It reflects the wider impact of unmanaged street conditions on Tower Street.

This is particularly worrying because Seven Dials is recognised as a Violence Against Women and Girls priority area. Retail and theatre workers here are disproportionately women, many of whom work late into the evening. Decisions about street layout and management in this area should be taken with women's safety clearly in mind. Allowing unmanaged clustering and loitering is not consistent with that responsibility.

Fire safety is also compromised. Bikes are frequently left in clusters that block access to theatres and obstruct routes used by staff and audiences. They also obstruct the designated emergency assembly point for the building, which is shared by multiple occupiers. Fire safety planning depends on clear, reliable access routes and the ability to reach agreed meeting points quickly. When those routes are routinely obstructed, emergency planning is undermined. In a busy cultural area like this, that is an avoidable and unacceptable risk.

Dockless e-bikes are often promoted on environmental grounds, but those claims need to be looked at honestly in their real-world context. On Tower Street we see frequent vehicle movements for rebalancing, removal and enforcement. Many journeys appear to replace walking rather than car use. Pavement congestion discourages pedestrian movement and accessibility.



Environmental benefit should not be assumed simply because a vehicle is electric. It is reasonable for this Committee to ask whether this scheme, in this location, delivers a genuine net benefit.

There is also a serious issue of accountability. Despite being the operator whose bikes are causing these problems, Lime has never engaged directly with affected businesses. There has been no meeting, no site visit, no contact from customer services and no named point of responsibility. All communication is filtered through Camden, leaving those affected without any meaningful route to resolution.

There is also a very practical issue about how Lime operates on the ground. The operator does not respect the limits of the designated bike bay. Bikes regularly overflow into Tower Court and are left in residents' parking areas, effectively turning private and residential space into an extension of Lime's operational footprint.

This means the impact is not confined to the bay the Council approved. It spills into neighbouring streets and residential parking, without consent and without any clear accountability. That is not fair on residents, and it further undermines confidence that the scheme is being managed properly.

Local businesses on Tower Street pay substantial business rates, rents and employment costs. We contribute transparently to the local economy. By contrast, a global company is allowed to operate commercially on the public highway, apparently for free, while generating ongoing costs for enforcement, management and public safety that fall on the Council and, ultimately, on taxpayers.

That imbalance is a legitimate scrutiny issue. If contractual arrangements prevent the Council from acting decisively to protect the highway, public safety and value for money, then those arrangements themselves need scrutiny. No contract should override the Council's statutory duties.

There is also a wider public cost. Lime e-bikes are not ordinary bicycles. They are heavy, fast vehicles used by riders who are often inexperienced and largely unaccountable. When injuries or near misses occur, the cost does not fall on the operator. It falls on the NHS, on emergency services and on individuals.

Against this background, the proposal to introduce a two-way cycle lane through Seven Dials, one of the most densely pedestrianised areas in London, is deeply concerning. Layering additional cycling infrastructure onto an area already struggling with safety, crime and unmanaged dockless bikes feels irresponsible unless the existing failures are addressed first.

This Committee exists to ask difficult questions about governance, accountability and outcomes.

The question here is not whether cycling is a good thing in principle. It is whether Camden is meeting its legal duties, protecting public money and acting in the public interest, or whether it has allowed itself to become locked into arrangements that benefit a private operator at the expense of residents, businesses and public safety.

Ultimately, this is not about enforcement effort. It is about location and design.

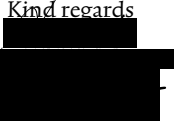
The Tower Street bay has been known to be unsuitable since early 2023. Continuing to manage an unworkable location through repeated enforcement is inefficient and ineffective.

I am asking the Committee to require officers to commit to a formal review, relocation or removal of the Tower Street dockless e-bike bay, to publish a clear timeline, to provide site-specific safety and enforcement data, and to require direct engagement from Lime with those affected.

This is not an anti-cycling position. It is a request for proportionate, responsible and accountable use of shared public space.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kind regards


Julia Jewell