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Gove accused of 'grandstanding' as he halts M&S flagship project

By James Warrington

MARKS & Spencer has criticised a decision by Michael Gove to halt the redevelopment of its flagship Oxford Street store as "political grandstanding".

The retailer had secured approval from Westminster city council and the Greater London Authority to demolish the central London landmark and build a new 10-storey block holding a smaller shop, offices and a gym.

But the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has seized control of the planning application amid concerns about its environmental impact.

Sacha Berendji, group property director at M&S, said it was "bewildered and disappointed" at the decision from the Levelling Up Secretary.

He added: "For a Government purportedly focused on the levelling up agenda, calling in this significant investment in one of our most iconic shopping locations will have a chilling effect for regeneration programmes across the country ... when many town centres are being left behind and the property market is ever more precarious."

Mr Gove issued a so-called Article 31 order forcing developers to put the project on hold. It will now be referred to an independent inspectorate.

Campaigners have lobbied against the plans, citing concerns about the amount of carbon released during the construction process.

Simon Sturgis, an architect and adviser to the Greater London Authority, says it would produce around 40,000 tons of carbon dioxide before the new building even came into use. However, M&S said independent consultants found the new, low-carbon building would more than offset any emissions from the redevelopment.

The DLUHC has been contacted for comment on the dispute, which highlights the conflict between Mr Gove's levelling up agenda and the Government's broader net-zero ambitions.

Ministers are also preparing to announce whether they will intervene in a £400million project to redevelop ITV's former South Bank studios. Dee

Corsi, chief operating officer at the New West End Company, said: "Securing a bright and prosperous future for Oxford Street requires high levels of investment and development.

"It is vital the council and businesses redouble efforts to work together ... and ensure progressive planning and licensing policies are in place to enable businesses to respond to changing customer trends, by delivering innovative and future proof buildings that are fit for purpose for a revived, dynamic high street."



The Marks & Spencer store on Oxford Street is earmarked for demolition