

Delivering Destination City

The Growth Strategy for the Square Mile



Contents

04	Foreword
06	Executive Summary
08	Introduction
10	Celebrating Success
12	City of London Corporation vision and leadership
24	Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)
26	Exemplar developments
38	Destination City timeline
40	What workers want
41	Data analysis
46	City voices
50	Creating a magnetic destination
58	Mapping the opportunity
62	Recommendations
62	Delivering the Destination City Vision
64	Leadership and Partnership
65	Funding
66	Acknowledgements
68	References

Forewords

A mosaic of local and global; historic and modern; business and culture; startup and multinational. The City of London is always evolving. We are competing on a global stage where the contest for talent, capital and attention has never been more intense.

Destination City is our strategy for growth, positioning the Square Mile as a magnetic destination for business, workers and visitors. This report helps articulate the delivery challenges, and opportunities, we face. It's a strategy which recognises the power of a virtuous cycle. The more people come here, the more investment follows. The more we invest in place, the more people want to be here. That's why this strategy is grounded in people.

We need to earn the commute of existing City workers, while exciting the next generation of talent. That means creating a Square Mile where people want to live, work, learn, and explore. A place that offers more than just world-class office space, but a rich, rewarding everyday experience.

Realising these ambitions will require delivery through planning, development and transport – the pillars of my committee's remit. By planning in a way that combines sensitivity and ambition, and developing the built environment with partners to emphasise an animated City, as well as enhancing the connectivity, biodiversity and cultural offer of the Square Mile, we can deliver the growth goals of Destination City.

It's a case of building on the City's unique strengths. And work is well underway. In the last year, the City Corporation has approved more than 350,000 square metres of new office space, and a phenomenal pipeline of proposed

projects will only add to this. Crucially, the market is buying in – more than two-thirds of the biggest schemes are already pre-let. And with a 25% growth in workers since before the pandemic, demand couldn't be clearer.

Destination City is respectful of our past and radical about our future. It embraces the Square Mile's unmatched heritage while setting a global benchmark for clean air, green streets and zero-carbon development. With an eye to longevity, sustainable design approaches are being pioneered here – fusing the pursuit of growth with a steadfast commitment to net zero.

As is demonstrated in this outstanding and timely report, ours is a shared vision. It is through partnership that we will deliver Destination City. Partnership between the people who live and work here, and between owners, investors, and occupiers. Between our Business Improvement Districts, Transport for London and developers. Partnership, ultimately, between all of us. Whatever your aspiration, in this Square Mile we will work together to achieve it.

Tom Sleigh,
Planning & Transportation Chairman
City of London Corporation



No one can be in any doubt about the huge importance of the Square Mile, both to the country's economy and to London's reputation as a great place to live, work and visit. The district gleams with countless bars, restaurants, cultural venues and historic landmarks, drawing thousands of visitors every day and helping the economy to keep firing on all cylinders.

A central pillar of the Mayor and Transport for London's (TfL) work is ensuring that our streets and spaces make the capital somewhere people enjoy being in: going to work, sitting in a park, meeting friends. This means reliable and accessible public transport options, it means equitable access to green space, and it means good quality walking and cycling infrastructure. Ensuring that more Londoners choose walking or wheeling for shorter journeys is good for people's health and wellbeing, the environment and the economy, but it also makes people feel more connected to their communities in and around the City.

London's cycleways are its arteries, seamlessly transporting people between boroughs and communities, and better connecting them to schools, hospitals, shops and leisure activities. The boom in cycling we've seen in London in recent years is fantastic and the City of London is leading the way, where a significant number of journeys are now made by bike. We want to build on this momentum.

To ensure the Square Mile remains both a cultural hub and a catalyst for growth in years to come, it's our responsibility to continue improving it, to meet the needs of our ever-evolving city. We cannot view the City as an island – its roots run deep into its neighbouring communities, and the key to

its success lies in further knitting it into our walking and cycling infrastructure which we're continuing to grow and improve. This work cannot be done alone, and collaboration between boroughs, businesses and transport authorities is key to improving the public realm for everyone. A brilliant example of this is the collaboration between TfL and the City Corporation on their Healthy Streets plans, which make environmental and safety improvements to our spaces with human health and experience built into the plans from the outset.

I'm really pleased to have been asked to provide the foreword to this report, and to be able to champion our shared goal of ensuring that London remains a destination city. This means making sure people can get around safely and confidently, breathe clean air and enjoy everything this wonderful city has to offer. It's not just a "nice-to-have"; it's what people deserve to expect. We will keep striving for this level of excellence, to keep London firmly positioned as a global competitor with other major cities.

Dr Will Norman,
London's Walking & Cycling Commissioner



Executive Summary

Destination City is the City of London Corporation’s flagship programme. Launched in 2021 to re-energise the Square Mile post-pandemic, it has since evolved into a bold growth strategy, positioning the City as a global destination for business and a leading centre for talent. This report reflects the programme’s expanded scope and ambition following Paul Martin’s 2024 independent review and supports its shift from vision to delivery.

While Destination City aims to engage residents and attract visitors, this report focuses on businesses and workers — the backbone of the Square Mile’s daytime economy. Their preferences shape the City’s retail, leisure and cultural offer. A key measure of success is therefore increased worker footfall, driven by vibrant public spaces, events and experiences — all of which also strengthen the City’s wider appeal.

Developed in a spirit of collaboration, partnership and unwavering support for the City Corporation’s Destination City programme, this CPA-led report celebrates successes and identifies challenges. It also presents recommendations for how the City Corporation, CPA, BIDs and partners can create a truly magnetic place for businesses and workers.

The Square Mile has changed dramatically over recent decades, with reimagined streets and a livelier ground-floor offer. The ambition now is to grow evening and weekend footfall by 5% annually, through extended hours, cultural programming and family-friendly

events. A new Culture Strategy will expand year-round activity and partnerships, while meanwhile uses and temporary activations will continue to keep the offer fresh and responsive.

Sustainability remains a priority. Motor traffic has fallen by two-thirds since 1999, and by 2044, the City aims for near-zero transport emissions. Greening initiatives like the Cool Streets and Greening Programme will ensure the Square Mile remains resilient, liveable and ecologically rich amid the growing impacts of climate change.

Overall, workers and businesses have a positive view of the Square Mile, however, feedback from interviews, workshops and data analysis surfaced several challenges:

- The City is a mosaic of districts, not a single destination — it should be positioned as a network of distinct, interconnected experiences.
- The public realm can feel too polished; people want softer, more human spaces.

- We should further strengthen the collaboration between developers and the City Corporation, ensuring that the public benefits of growth are directed towards spaces desired by workers.
- It can be challenging to coordinate landowners, developers and other partners to drive the required investment and transformation of the public realm.
- Elevated public spaces could be further activated for a more immersive and enjoyable experience.
- Better wayfinding would make the Square Mile more legible and accessible.
- The City’s edges should feel more open; stronger links with surrounding communities in the ‘City halo’.
- Guidance is needed on how to match the ambitions between the City Corporation, developers, BIDs, CPA and TfL to deliver the Destination City vision in partnership.

To address these challenges, the report proposes practical recommendations under three themes:

1. Delivering Destination City



- Develop a Square Mile Spatial Vision, led by the City Corporation and co-created with partners, to align priorities and coordinate delivery.
- Appoint a Destination City Champion who would work across planning, highways and other City Corporation departments to drive forward transformational public realm.
- Embrace greener, more characterful spaces to make the Square Mile feel more inviting and inclusive.
- Introduce a digital wayfinding system, alongside Legible London, to encourage exploration.

2. Policy and Leadership



- Allow developer contributions to fund more impactful ground-level projects. Where viewing galleries are delivered, loosen restrictions to support activation and commercialisation.
- Introduce a City-wide network of assets for meanwhile use, matching vacant or transitional spaces with cultural providers to bring them back to life.
- Define success with shared KPIs to track progress and support evidence-based decisions, with clearer roles and responsibilities for Destination City to help strengthen collaboration.

3. Funding



- Establish a City of London Infrastructure Fund, drawing on proven models such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). Pooling public and private funding streams under a clear governance framework would enable long-term planning and strategic, multi-year investment in priority projects aligned with Destination City objectives.
- Building on policies in the emerging City Plan, introduce a payment in lieu model, similar to affordable housing offsets, allowing developers to provide funding in place of onsite features like viewing galleries or cultural spaces. Pool contributions into a central City fund, to be directed toward more impactful, city-wide public realm projects. Further cost-benefit analysis is recommended to compare investment in viewing galleries versus ground-level public realm projects, ensuring resources deliver the greatest benefit.

Introduction

The Square Mile is undergoing a profound transformation. Long known as a global hub for finance and business, the City of London is redefining itself as a vibrant, inclusive and magnetic quarter where ancient heritage meets innovation and progress. Iconic landmarks, world-class cultural institutions and a young, internationally diverse workforce form the foundation for a new era — one where the City is no longer just a place of work, but a compelling year-round destination.

Changing occupier demands, improved transport connectivity and shifting lifestyle expectations are accelerating this evolution. Six million people of working age now live within an hour’s commute of the City. Weekday worker numbers are returning to pre-pandemic levels, while weekend footfall continues to rise.¹ For the first time ever, the City’s economic output has surpassed £100 billion annually and the number of jobs has grown by 25% since the pandemic.² The City Plan 2040 identifies a need for a minimum of 1.2 million sqm of new Class A workspace. As global competition intensifies, the need for high-quality, dynamic urban environments that attract and retain talent is more critical than ever.

At the heart of this transformation is Destination City — the City of London Corporation’s flagship programme. Originally launched in 2021 as a post-pandemic initiative to encourage workers and visitors back to the City, the programme has since evolved into a growth strategy and partnership approach that is shaping the future of the Square Mile as a globally attractive destination for

businesses, and a major centre for talent.³ Its success rests on strengthening the City as a welcoming and inclusive destination for all — a place to live, work, learn and explore.

“Destination City is the growth strategy for the Square Mile as a location. In the decade ahead, the City aims to be not just a global magnet for international talent and finance, but a global magnet as a place... [It] should be a collaborative partnership programme with the Corporation of London providing the strategic direction, steerage and collaborative ethos rather than an autonomously provided set of activities.”

— 2024 Paul Martin review

Destination City is now being embedded across City of London Corporation departments, including planning, lighting, culture, policing and transport — laying the groundwork for an integrated approach to placemaking, programming and economic development.

This paper builds on the CPA’s Visualising Destination City report (2023), which identified ten key recommendations to animate the public realm, boost dwell time and enhance the visitor experience through investments in streetscapes, streamlined decision-making, leveraged public funds, improved connectivity and cultural vibrancy. As Destination City moves from vision to delivery, the purpose of this paper is to match the growth in ambition and scope of the programme following a 2024 independent review by Paul Martin.

As the voice of property in the Square Mile, the City Property Association (CPA) is uniquely positioned to articulate how the real estate sector can support the City of London Corporation’s principal growth strategy. This includes unlocking opportunities for public-private collaboration to deliver “magnetic” places — characterised by consistently lively, engaging and inclusive ground-floor experiences — alongside strategic partners including Greater London Authority (GLA) Transport for London (TfL), the City Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and cultural institutions.

Developed in a spirit of collaboration, partnership and unwavering support for the City of London Corporation’s Destination

City programme, this paper should be read alongside other key placemaking and policy documents, including the City of London Corporation’s Destination City growth plan, draft City Plan 2040, Transport Strategy and emerging Cultural Strategy.

This paper has been informed by the CPA’s Destination City Working Group with contributions from key partners and stakeholders. Macro trends have been identified through occupier and user data, supplemented by qualitative insights from individual interviews and vox pops.

While Destination City rightly seeks to engage local residents and attract a broader demographic of UK and international visitors, this paper focuses specifically on businesses and workers, who continue to form the backbone of the Square Mile’s daytime economy, and whose preferences significantly shape the City’s retail, leisure and cultural offer. A key measure of Destination City’s success, therefore, is an increase in worker footfall, driven by places and experiences that draw people into the Square Mile — from a high-quality public realm to vibrant cultural events, retail and leisure. In turn, these same qualities will naturally enhance the City’s appeal to visitors from near and far.



Finsbury Circus Gardens © Realm

Celebrating successes

1

As a powerhouse of talent, innovation and economic activity, the City of London plays a vital role in driving the UK economy. With an annual output of £109 billion and generating £1.2 billion in business rates, the Square Mile stands as a national asset of global importance.⁴ Between 2019 and 2023, it contributed to the creation of nearly 136,000 new jobs — further underscoring its capacity to generate growth, opportunity and resilience.⁵

136k

new jobs created between 2019 and 2023

£1.2bn

business rates generated by the Square Mile

Destination City is a cornerstone initiative that builds on this strength, underpinning a wide spectrum of placemaking strategies and projects aimed at reinforcing the City’s role as an open, inclusive and internationally attractive destination. The programme is not only revitalising the public realm but also stimulating economic activity and promoting sustainable development. At its core is a deeply collaborative model, with City of London Corporation working closely with BIDs, the CPA, property owners and a broad network of civic and institutional partners, as well as The Livery Companies, who contribute to its collaborative success by fostering trusted cross-sector networks.

Many successes have already been achieved through Destination City. The following section highlights how these achievements are particularly visible in the transformation of the public realm — enhancing the everyday experience for workers and businesses while supporting the City’s continued economic dynamism.

City of London Corporation vision and leadership

As a leading force behind the transformation of the Square Mile, the City of London Corporation is setting a bold agenda through Destination City — its flagship policy initiative under the Chairmanship of Chris Hayward. The programme reflects the Corporation’s long-term vision for inclusive growth, economic resilience and cultural vibrancy. Closely aligned with major strategic frameworks including the draft City Plan 2040, the Transport Strategy and the emerging Cultural Strategy, Destination City underscores the City’s leadership in shaping a thriving and magnetic destination.

Streets and movement

The City Corporation’s street improvement programme is reshaping how people experience the Square Mile, placing people walking, wheeling and cycling at the centre of urban mobility. Approximately one-third of streets have already been transformed — gyratories removed, carriageways repurposed and pavements widened — resulting in a more welcoming, accessible and green environment that encourages walking, lingering and discovery.

Since 1999, motor traffic has fallen by nearly two-thirds — a trend driven by the Congestion Charge, Cycle Superhighways and pandemic-era street reconfigurations. The Corporation has committed to reducing motor traffic further, by at least 25% by 2030 and 50% by 2044, favouring cleaner, quieter modes of travel.⁶ As a result, streets are being reimagined as spaces for people — animated

by street markets, performances, al fresco dining and meanwhile activities. Temporary pavement licences support this shift, enabling outdoor hospitality and social interaction to flourish.

Walking is now the dominant mode of travel in the City, supported by 25 kilometres of pedestrian-priority streets, with plans to extend this to 55 kilometres by 2044.⁷ New routes — secured through permeable private developments — will further enhance walkability and wheeling access. Cycling has also surged, with numbers increasing fourfold since 1999; on many routes, cyclists now outnumber cars.⁸ The City Cycle Network, delivered with TfL, is expanding to ensure all building entrances are within 250 metres of a cycling route.

The City is one of the UK’s most accessible locations, and public transport remains the



primary mode of access.⁹ Remarkably, 96% of office buildings are within a five-minute walk of a station, making sustainable transport the default choice for most.¹⁰

By 2044, the City Corporation aims to achieve near-zero local air pollution and transport-related carbon emissions, setting a global benchmark for clean urban air. All new developments will be car-free, and a Sustainable Servicing Programme will prioritise last-mile deliveries by cargo bike. In parallel, the City Corporation is preparing to accommodate emerging technologies — such as autonomous vehicles, drones, delivery droids and shared mobility — through forward-thinking legislation and planning.¹¹

25%
reduction in motor traffic by 2030
committed to by the Corporation

50%
reduction in motor traffic by 2044
committed to by the Corporation

Greening and biodiversity

The Square Mile hosts 376 open spaces totalling 35 hectares, offering vital opportunities for rest, recreation and nature connection. As climate change brings increased risks of extreme heat, flooding and biodiversity loss, the City of London Corporation is leading a proactive, place-based response to ensure the Square Mile remains liveable, resilient and ecologically rich for generations to come.

In partnership with public and private stakeholders, the City Corporation is committed to expanding and enhancing urban greening in ways that are climate-resilient, biodiverse, inclusive and accessible. This involves enhancing existing greenspaces, embedding green infrastructure in new developments and delivering a connected network of green corridors through the Cool Streets and Greening Programme. These corridors — featuring street trees, climate-resilient planting and sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) — will help regulate temperatures, mitigate flood risk, improve air quality and enhance pedestrian comfort. To ensure continuous improvement and measurable impact, all interventions

are monitored and evaluated as part of the City’s Climate Action Strategy.¹² The City of London Public Realm Toolkit sets out a clear urban greening hierarchy designed to guide development teams in delivering long-term benefits — prioritising access to nature, legacy trees and strategies that support urban biodiversity and climate adaptation.

In this densely built urban environment, developments are expected to deliver meaningful, inclusive and publicly accessible greening within office spaces, with offsite provision a last resort. All new developments must achieve an Urban Greening Factor of 0.3, supported in part by green roofs and the integration of SuDS to manage surface water and reduce flood risk. New developments in the City have embraced biodiversity and terraces in response to market demand for wellbeing and sustainability.

High footfalls around destinations such as Smithfield and green space deficiencies in areas like the City Cluster highlight the critical need for exceptional-quality green infrastructure. This includes green roofs and rooftop terraces that provide relief, beauty and ecological function.



Ground floor activation

To create a more vibrant and engaging cityscape, the City of London Corporation is prioritising the activation of ground-floor spaces with a richer and more diverse mix of retail, cultural, leisure and experiential uses. Delivered in close partnership with the BIDs, developers and operators, this work is key to shaping a dynamic and inclusive ground-level experience that draws people in and invites them to linger. The approach responds to an increased demand for flexible formats — such as pop-ups, street markets and independent retail — that support entrepreneurship, stimulate footfall and add character to the public realm.¹³ Developers are encouraged to embrace design approaches that blur the boundaries between public and private space, fostering a seamless integration that makes the ground plane more open, accessible and people focused. This strategy strengthens the connections between commercial uses, streets and open spaces — ensuring a cohesive, animated and welcoming urban environment.

Evolving post-pandemic working patterns have reshaped footfall trends in the City.

While weekday activity — particularly from Tuesday to Thursday — now exceeds pre-pandemic levels, evenings and long weekends remain comparatively quiet, with notable drops in footfall after 6pm and Fridays to Mondays. However, people are spending more time per visit and the rise in weekend journeys indicates longer stays during non-work periods. The City Corporation is promoting improvements to the office microenvironment and the surrounding public realm to cultivate a consistent presence of people in the Square Mile. A key goal is to grow evening and weekend activity steadily, targeting a 5% year-on-year increase in footfall on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Extended opening hours — such as after-hours dining in Smithfield, cultural programming and family-friendly events — will help bridge the gap between daytime and nighttime activity, unlocking new opportunities to experience the City outside of traditional working hours. Through these measures, the Corporation aims to support a more balanced, resilient and lively urban economy — one that reflects the City’s growing role as a place not just for work, but for culture, community and life.

Elevated public spaces

The City of London uniquely offers a range of publicly accessible viewing galleries, gardens and terraces that provide striking views across London’s skyline. These spaces are part of a commitment to public benefit through accessible, high-quality spaces at height — offering moments of reflection, orientation and enjoyment in an increasingly vertical urban environment. Such spaces are also reshaping perceptions of the Square Mile. They attract a broad audience — including school groups and local communities — encouraging wider engagement with the City and its rich heritage.

Since opening in 2014, the Sky Garden at the top of 20 Fenchurch Street (‘the Walkie Talkie’), which combines panoramic views with restaurants and a bar, has welcomed over 12 million visitors.¹⁴ Building on this success, Destination City is now exploring how upper-level amenities could further evolve to meet the varying needs of workers. The Sky Garden is rated as one of the top five things to do in London on TripAdvisor.

41m

people have visited viewing galleries in the City of London since 2010.

Visitor numbers

One New Change public roof terrace:
25m since 2010

The Sky Garden:
12.5m since 2015

The Garden at 120 (120 Fenchurch Street):
2.3m since 2019

Horizon22 (22 Bishopsgate):
1m since 2023

The Lookout (8 Bishopsgate):
0.5m since 2023



Sky Garden 20 Fenchurch Street

Cultural programming

The Square Mile boasts a dense concentration of world-class cultural assets that play a pivotal role in shaping the City of London's identity as a global destination. Its rich cultural offer spans iconic institutions and heritage landmarks, as well as smaller, informal and temporary venues that animate the City at every scale. Signature events — such as the Lord Mayor's Show and the London Festival of Architecture — draw large and diverse audiences, reinforcing the City's place on the cultural map. As the UK's fourth-largest public funder of culture, the City Corporation is building on the momentum of Destination City to leverage the Square Mile's extraordinary cultural and heritage fabric — enhancing the public realm, increasing footfall and stimulating economic activity, particularly along key pedestrian and commercial corridors. The rich cultural ecosystem of the Square Mile is essential to attract talent and businesses; a study has found that employees who regularly engage with cultural events in

the workplace are nearly three times more likely to feel inspired by their jobs.¹⁵

A new Culture Strategy, aligned with the Destination City vision, is currently in development and due to launch in early 2026. This strategy will build on the City's existing cultural infrastructure and expand the year-round programme delivered by the City Corporation and its cultural partners — including the Barbican Centre, London Museum, London Symphony Orchestra and Guildhall School of Music & Drama — alongside BIDs, local businesses and community organisations. The strategy is co-created and will be delivered collaboratively, strengthening cross-sector partnerships and activating the Square Mile's vibrant cultural landscape to deliver shared goals in a unified and impactful way.

The Culture Strategy will expand the City's flagship events programme to include more activities — some of which will be small-

scale and meanwhile — throughout the year, ensuring a rich, consistent offer. The City Plan 2040 highlights the importance of providing accessible, low-cost workspaces and encourages the use of meanwhile spaces to support cultural and creative activity. Programming and digital engagement will work together to attract new audiences, support repeat visits and grow the City's reputation as a cultural hub.

A key ambition for the City Corporation is to unlock underused and overlooked spaces, enabling major institutions such as the Barbican and Guildhall School to present activities in new locations and formats. This includes encouraging temporary creative use of vacant buildings to bring fresh energy and experimentation to the cultural offer while encouraging exploration and return visits.

Revealing and celebrating the area's extraordinary heritage is also central to the City Corporation. The Square Mile is steeped

in history and a living representation of London's ancient roots. The Corporation is actively supporting landowners in celebrating the heritage in and around developments, enabling history and modernity to coexist in extraordinary juxtapositions. Improving access, visibility and integration of historic sites into the public realm will ensure they continue to enrich lives, tell the City's story and shape its evolving identity.

Alongside the new Culture Strategy, the City Belonging Project is supporting a more inclusive and connected Square Mile through workplace diversity groups, inter-company networks, inclusive cultural events and support for under-represented groups. It is also helping to bridge gaps between communities, allowing the positive impacts of the Square Mile to ripple beyond its boundaries and benefit adjoining areas. One important aspect will be to provide spaces that are free to use for everyone, with no need to pay to stay.





Aldgate Winter Festival © Aldgate Connect BID

Lighting, safety and delight

The Corporation's Light and Darkness in the City strategy sets out a creative, intelligent and sustainable approach to urban lighting — one that thoughtfully balances light and shadow to create a distinctive nighttime townscape. It aims to enhance the City's after-dark appeal, support a vibrant night-time economy and deliver a high-quality evening experience worthy of a global destination.¹⁶

Smart lighting controls play a central role, enabling dynamic adjustments based on real-time data to respond to events, emergencies and fluctuating pedestrian activity. A core ambition of the strategy is to enhance both actual and perceived safety after dark. Well-designed lighting is recognised not only as critical for visibility and wayfinding but also for building a sense of comfort and reassurance for all who live, work and visit the City.

Although the Square Mile has generally low levels of crime and fear of crime — with 64% of people reporting that they feel safe — women and girls are significantly more likely to feel unsafe at night. To address this, the Safer City Partnership — made up of City of London Corporation, City of London Police, London Fire Brigade and the City and Hackney Integrated Care Board — is actively tackling issues such as anti-social behaviour, violence against women and girls and serious crime linked to the nighttime economy.¹⁷

This partnership is working not only through enforcement but by identifying opportunities to reduce crime through thoughtful improvements to street design, lighting and overall public space management to ensure that the City remains a safe and welcoming place for everyone, day and night.

Destination branding and communications

Originally developed by the CPA in partnership with City of London Corporation, and delivered by NLA, One City is a digital platform designed to reimagine and promote the Square Mile as more than a global financial hub. Serving as a central communications channel, it showcases the City's growing offer across culture, leisure, retail and hospitality.

Through its website and social media channels, One City curates and shares content that connects young professionals and visitors with local businesses, events and attractions. The platform is particularly effective in engaging the City's younger workforce, a demographic that represents a significant portion of the daily population. By highlighting the Square Mile's unique mix of offerings, the City is promoted not only a place to work, but a place to explore, socialise and unwind.

One City played a vital role in the City's post-pandemic recovery, helping to reconnect people with public life, local venues and shared experiences. The most popular source of information is the One City Instagram channel, which recorded just over 150,000 followers in April of this year, and a 1.55 million reach.¹⁸ A 2025 One City impact study revealed that the platform is successfully promoting engagement amongst social media users, but that the website is not reaching all demographics, with awareness lower amongst the general population than City workers and residents.¹⁹

Alongside One City, the City of London's two websites (www.thecityofldn.com and www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do) serve as key sources of information on what's happening in the Square Mile. They offer updates on cultural events, public realm projects, business news and strategic initiatives like Destination City. They also provide practical details for residents, workers and visitors — including planning, transport and services.

Meanwhile, the BID's in the City use a range of methods to promote the area. These include:

- Events and activations to animate public spaces.
- Place branding and marketing campaigns targeting workers, visitors and investors.
- Partnerships with cultural institutions to showcase the City's creative offer.
- Social media, newsletters and online platforms to engage audiences and share what is happening in their area.
- Data gathering and insights to inform targeted initiatives and measure impact.

Together, these approaches help reinforce the Square Mile as a vibrant destination for business, culture and leisure. However, the different platforms could benefit from being more joined-up.

The City Corporation continues to leverage the One City platform as part of its broader ambition to reframe perceptions of the Square Mile — presenting it as an inclusive, culturally rich destination that blends historic legacy with contemporary urban vitality. In close collaboration with NLA and Destination City partners, the City Corporation is curating a cohesive communications and content strategy to amplify the City's offer and drive increased footfall. To support this effort, the Corporation is also developing a Destination City Dashboard, which will provide real-time data on visitor demographics, behaviours and attitudes. This tool will enable more effective data sharing with partners, informing decision-making and shaping responsive, insight-driven strategies to meet the City's evolving needs and opportunities.



Exchange Square © DSDHA

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

The City of London is home to five BIDs — Aldgate Connect, Cheapside Business Alliance, Fleet Street Quarter, Culture Mile and the Eastern City (EC) Partnership. Plans are in progress to establish a sixth BID – Riverside – which would result in BID coverage across most of the Square Mile. Together, they invest nearly £10 million each year to enhance distinct areas of the Square Mile and advance the ambitions of Destination City. From shaping the public realm and curating cultural programmes to driving place activation and strengthening identity, the BIDs play a vital role in reimagining the City's future. Working collaboratively as a BID alliance, they enable strategic coordination and delivery across neighbourhoods and serve as powerful catalysts for investment, innovation, and community engagement.

Primera acts as the strategic delivery partner for the City BIDs, providing expert support in governance, operations, stakeholder engagement and the development of long-term visions that align with local priorities and drive meaningful change across the Square Mile.

Each BID has developed its own public realm visions, responding to local priorities and opportunities:

- **Aldgate Connect's Public Realm Vision and Strategy** (2022) builds on recent improvements such as Aldgate Square, recognising the need for a more connected, inclusive and flexible public realm. The strategy focuses on key gateways as community destinations, enhancing green spaces, reclaiming streets for pedestrians and cyclists and celebrating Aldgate's heritage amid rapid residential and commercial growth.
- **The Cheapside Business Alliance** aims to transform one of the City's most historic and commercially active districts into a greener, more people-centred destination. It supports major public realm projects such as the Bank Junction improvements and Greening Cheapside, while enhancing the

area through temporary events and curated activations that foster a vibrant ground-floor experience. The Alliance is also exploring opportunities around St Paul's, New Change Gardens and Bow Courtyard to strengthen Cheapside's identity as a dynamic, day-to-night destination.

- **The Fleet Street Quarter's Era of Change** (2023) sets out area-wide targets for greenery, seating and public space, with Fleet Street as the top priority. Backed by a £1 million investment, the BID is delivering projects including a newly lit Holborn Viaduct, safer alleyways and a reimagined Fleet Street designed to invite people to linger.
- **The Culture Mile Public Realm Vision and Strategy** (2024) is driving the evolution of the north-western City into a vibrant cultural district anchored by institutions like the Barbican and London Museum. Its vision prioritises inclusive design, improved legibility and permeability, cultural activation and public art — all to support a more welcoming, creative and connected urban environment.
- **The Eastern City Public Realm Vision** (2024), shaped through extensive engagement, sets out a collaborative blueprint for delivering improvements to public space. With over 90,000 daily workers and rising visitor numbers, the strategy supports a mix of interventions — including improvements to Leadenhall Street, Lombard Street and Jubilee Gardens — underpinned by new funding models and partnership delivery.

Together, these ambitious strategies illustrate the power of partnership between BIDs, businesses, developers, the City Corporation and wider stakeholders — unlocking investment and coalescing around shared visions to deliver a more inclusive, liveable and vibrant Square Mile.

In addition to the established BIDs, **The City River Partnership** is emerging as a strategic initiative to reimagine the riverside as a dynamic and connected part of the Square Mile. There is clear appetite to develop a BID-led Public Realm Vision that complements

the work of other City BIDs, focusing on the unique potential of the River Thames. With major developments in the pipeline, the aspiration is to maximise investment in the public realm along the riverfront. Priorities will include enhancing wayfinding and north-south connectivity and better linking the river to the wider City.



London Wall Place © Make Architects

Camomile Street by Fletcher Priest Architects and Gustafson Porter + Bowman for AXA IM Alts

This landmark development at 63 St Mary Axe in the City of London's Eastern Cluster proposes to transform the local streetscape with a strong emphasis on public realm, greening and cultural activation at ground level.

At its heart is Camomile Park — a new six-storey linear park that stitches together landscaped walkways, balconies and public gardens, delivering a significant injection of greenery into the dense urban fabric. Mature trees, low-level planting and generous seating areas will create a calm, sheltered environment for workers and visitors. The remains of the St Augustine Papey churchyard will be retained and celebrated within the new public realm.

The proposals also include the unveiling of a buried section of London's Roman Wall, reconnecting the public with the City's ancient past. This historic feature will be framed within the park's southwestern edge, offering a unique cultural focal point along the original route of London Wall.

A multi-functional auditorium at ground level will be available for grassroots cultural programming and community use, contributing to a more animated street-level experience. Food and beverage outlets integrated across the lower floors will partner with social enterprises to provide training and employment opportunities in hospitality for disadvantaged adults.

Fossil fuel-free and fully electric, the scheme supports the City of London Corporation's ambition to create a greener, more inclusive Square Mile that is vibrant beyond working hours — blending heritage, sustainability and culture in one of the City's most dynamic districts.



Camomile Street CGI

Greyfriars Square by LDA Design for City of London Corporation

The City Corporation is transforming the St Paul's gyratory, a road system largely unchanged since the 1970s, into a more people-focused environment anchored by a new 3,000-square-metre public space: Greyfriars Square.

The scheme reconfigures traffic flow, closes the southern section of King Edward Street and converts 1,500 square metres of carriageway into pedestrian space. It will also deliver 800 metres of new east-west and north-south cycle lanes, alongside improved crossings for people walking and cycling.

Greyfriars Square will introduce a series of planted areas, including rain gardens and a monastic garden inspired by the historic friary kitchen garden once located on the site. The space will feature new seating, trees and a children's play area, creating a vibrant, accessible space for pause and play in the heart of the City.

The St Paul's Gyratory project will improve connectivity between key cultural destinations — from the Tate Modern across the Millennium Bridge to the future London Museum at Smithfield and The Barbican Centre — strengthening the City's offer for workers, residents and visitors. Construction began in spring 2025 and is expected to complete in 2027.



Greyfriars Square CGI © LDA Design

All Change at Bank by Publica for City of London Corporation and Transport for London

The All Change at Bank project, completed in summer 2024, marks a transformative shift from a vehicle-dominated junction to a pedestrian-first environment in the heart of the City of London.

Bank Junction — historically one of the busiest and most hazardous intersections — has been reimaged with narrower carriageways, widened pavements, improved crossings, seating, planting and enhanced public spaces that prioritise walking, wheeling and cycling.

This ambitious scheme supports Transport for London's upgrades to Bank Station, which have significantly increased passenger capacity and accessibility. Together, these interventions respond to the growing volume of people moving through the area on foot and by bike, while reinforcing the civic importance of the junction, which is framed by landmark buildings including the Bank of England, Royal Exchange and Mansion House.

The project's core objectives were to improve safety by reducing collisions, alleviate pedestrian congestion, enhance air quality and strengthen the perception of Bank as a destination in its own right — not just a thoroughfare. By reclaiming space for people and greening a historically hardscaped environment, All Change at Bank is a defining example of how strategic public realm investment can unlock a more inclusive, healthier and welcoming Square Mile.



11 Bank Junction © Simon Kennedy

Finsbury Circus Gardens by Studio Weave for City of London Corporation

Finsbury Circus Gardens is the City of London's largest and oldest public open space, with origins dating back to the 17th century.

Known for its mature London plane trees and its rare Japanese Pagoda tree — the only one in the Square Mile — the gardens have now been restored following a decade-long closure during the construction of the Elizabeth line.

The scheme replaces lost amenity, biodiversity and civic space with a contemporary, climate-resilient landscape. The gardens have been reimagined as a tranquil urban haven, supporting health, wellbeing and ecological richness.

The design amplifies biodiversity with three new planting character areas:

- A woodland habitat with shade tolerant planting beneath the existing London Plane trees.
- Riverside margin planting with rain gardens, referencing the historic River Walbrook, which still flows underground through the City of London.
- A herbaceous perennial border with tall grasses and spring bulbs that support pollinators.

As one of the Square Mile's most significant green assets, Finsbury Circus Gardens demonstrates the power of high-quality public realm to support climate adaptation, urban nature and civic life. This investment aligns with the Destination City vision — making the City a more vibrant, inclusive and resilient destination.



Finsbury Circus Gardens © Realm

Exchange Square by DSDHA for British Land

Exchange Square is a major new public park for the City of London, suspended above the tracks of Liverpool Street Station. As the culmination of DSDHA's Broadgate Public Realm Framework for British Land, the project exemplifies how high-quality public realm can reshape perceptions — transforming an once utilitarian, office-dominated environment into a welcoming, mixed-use destination focused on nature and wellbeing, as well as a prestigious new commercial address.

At 1.5 acres, Exchange Square is one of the Square Mile's largest green spaces, unfolding across multiple levels to create an undulating landscape that invites people to meet, work, relax and celebrate, surrounded by greenery. Designed with horticulturalists FFLO, DSDHA's landscape strategy enhances biodiversity with over 14,000 plants and more than 140 species, offering year-round sensory interest to encourage repeat visits.

Accessibility was a core design driver. Eliminating barriers such as level changes, lack of visual contrast and poor signage has created an inclusive space for all, around which the original office buildings have been retrofitted with new front doors onto the square. Feedback from local tenants at early-stage consultation expressed a strong desire for a more relaxed, less corporate atmosphere, with flexibility for temporary events and activations.

The result is a vibrant, nature-rich environment that draws a more diverse mix of users and supports wellbeing and productivity. Extended opening hours and increased programming are helping to position Broadgate as a seven-day destination — signalling a broader shift toward a more inviting, human-centred Square Mile.



Exchange Square © DSDHA

Broadworks by Hive Curates with Eastern City BID and Landsec

In September 2023, the Eastern City BID partnered with Landsec and creative workspace provider Hive Curates to transform 5,426 sq ft of retail and upper floor commercial space at 56 Old Broad Street into a creative hub with studios, an art gallery, event space, café and shop. A terrace was used for various events, including film screenings, silent disco, poetry and music evenings.

Conceived as a meanwhile placemaking project with an initial 18-month lifespan, the initiative established a community of creatives at the heart of the City, using artistry to transform the everyday and bridging the gap between culture and working community. The space served as an incubator for artistic talent from across London — individuals who might not otherwise have had a presence in the area.

Broadworks' studio space was 300% oversubscribed on opening and as of late 2024 the site had welcomed 11,483 visitors, hosted 90 events, supported 355 creative businesses and generated 182 jobs — supporting the Destination City ambition to create a livelier and diversified ground level experience. The year-round programme of free events — from bookbinding to leather work, cartoon drawing and vase upcycling — attracted a variety of people, both City workers and Londoners from adjacent boroughs, with over 50% identifying as belonging to mixed or multiple ethnic groups.²⁰ Based on a metrics from the HM Treasury and Social Value International, the scheme has delivered £7,999,200 worth of social value — a return of £25.47 for every £1 invested.

Broadworks has demonstrated that creative workspaces can offer commercially viable solutions for spaces that are end-of-life, in

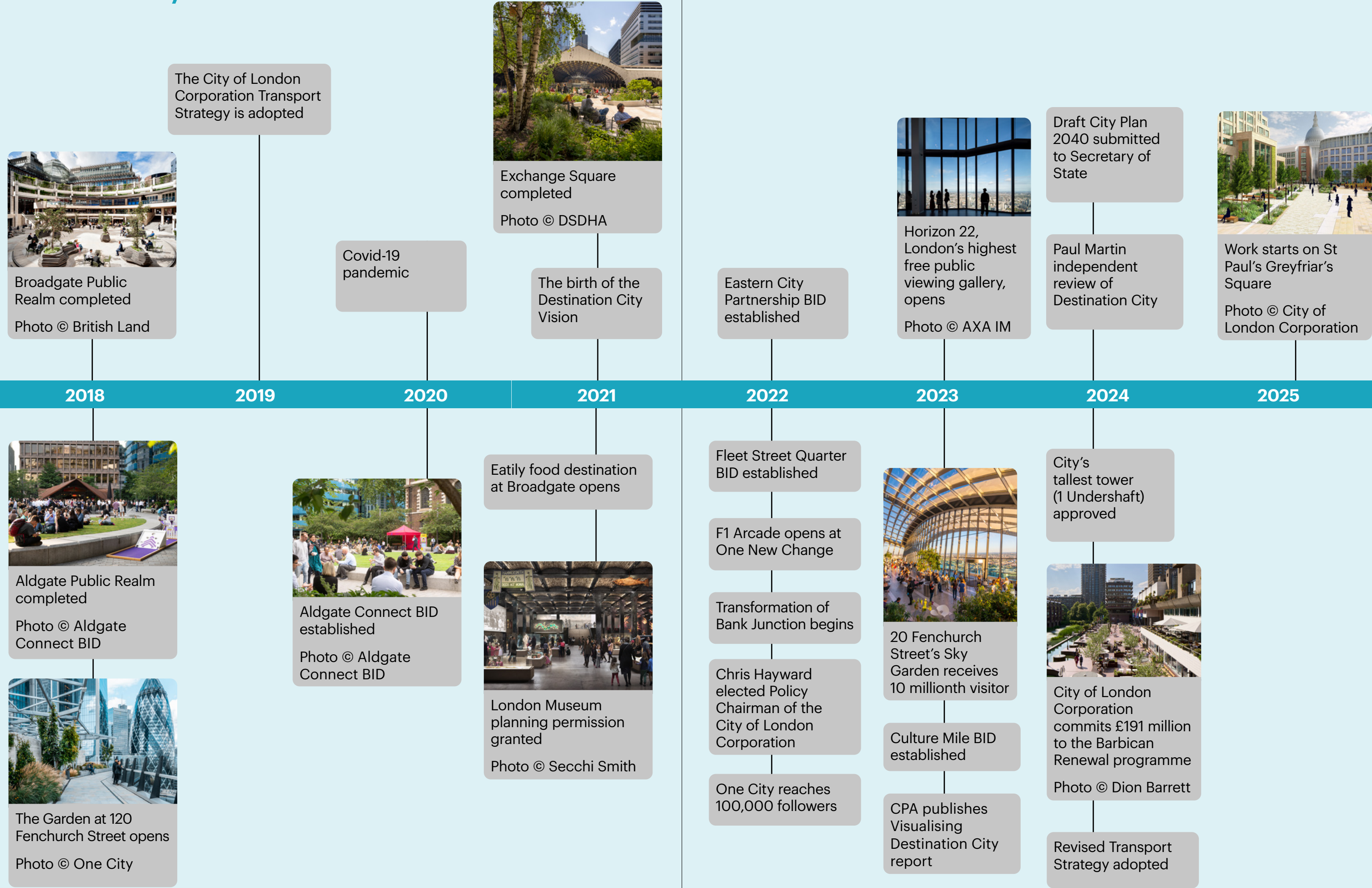
hiatus or in transition. With support from operators — through flexible leases, portable fit-outs and activation funds — organisations are able to establish themselves and relocate with ease. Its success has strengthened the case for creative workspace in the City, inspiring several similar initiatives now underway. These include a micro museum in

a disused public toilet beside The Monument, a ceramics studio in a former key-cutting shop on Crutched Friars, and a performing arts rehearsal space in a former restaurant on Leadenhall Street. Though temporary, these interventions provide valuable insights for the long-term, permanent integration of cultural space within the City.



Broadworks © Sarah Larby

Destination City timeline



What workers want

Data analysis

Any effective plan or strategy to attract and retain businesses and workers in a place like the City must be rooted not only in professional expertise and evidence-based interventions but in the experiences of everyday users to understand what they want to see more (and less) of. By integrating these insights, authorities can deliver tangible, well-received outcomes that create lasting value, stimulate growth and support long-term sustainability. This section offers insights into what workers want based on quantitative surveys and vox pop interviews.

Data analysis

A variety of surveys, reports and datasets have been shared with CPA, offering valuable glimpses into the priorities and experiences of those working in the Square Mile, offering a snapshot of the bigger picture. These data sources include:

- Surveys and studies conducted by organisations deeply involved in public realm improvements, such as the BIDs and the City Corporation.
- User surveys from occupants of developments that are largely completed and occupied.
- Detailed analyses of stakeholder needs and aspirations linked to planned major developments, which often focus on the wider community's interests.

Taken together, these insights provide a meaningful foundation to understand the needs and concerns of the City's workforce. Overall, those working in the City tend to report a positive experience of its public spaces and amenities. For example, in one survey, over 80% of respondents described their perceptions as either "very positive" or "positive." Across multiple studies, priorities consistently centred on getting the basics right — ensuring public spaces are clean, safe and welcoming.

Safety

Perceptions of safety in the City vary considerably depending on the time of day. While a very high proportion of respondents — over 90% — reported feeling safe during office hours, this figure drops significantly later in the evening, with fewer than half saying they feel safe after 10pm.

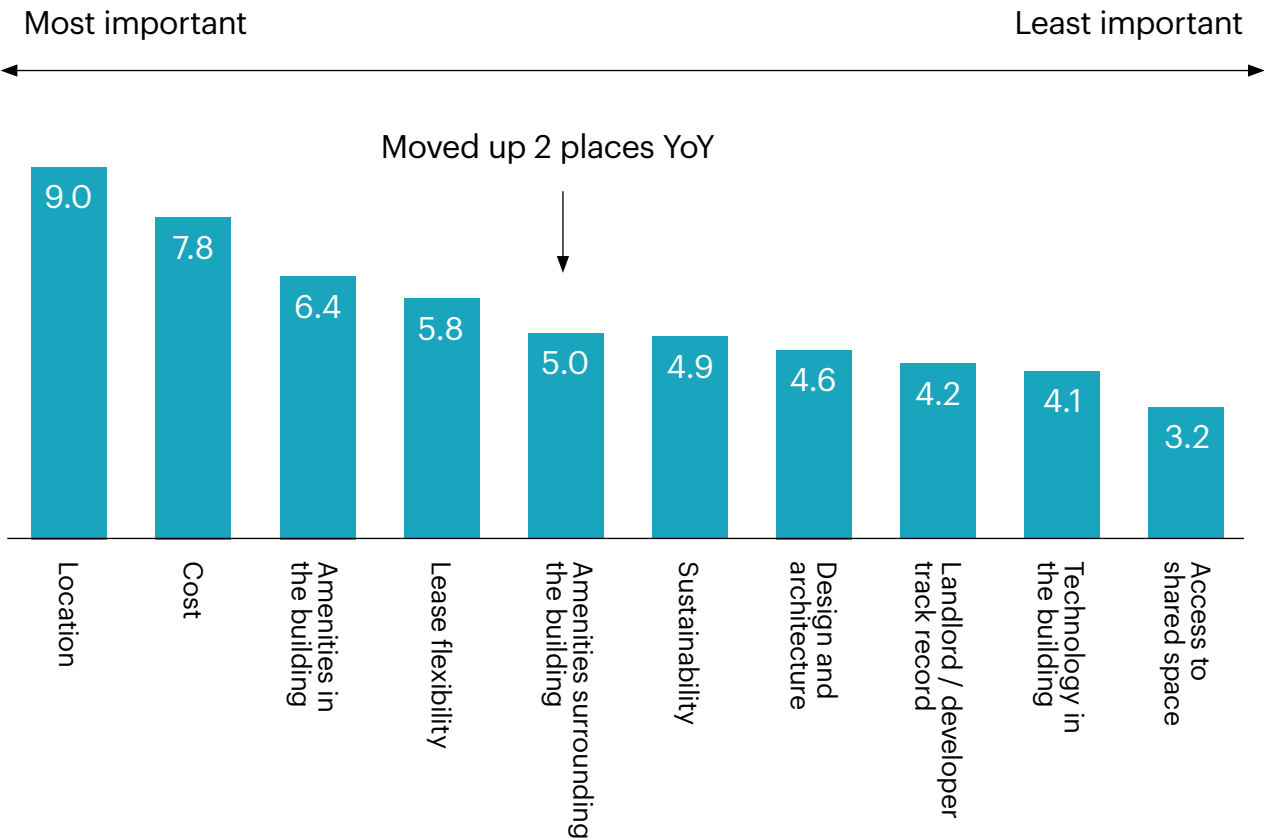
The top three safety concerns identified in the same survey were theft, road safety and drink spiking (in pubs and bars). Rising levels of phone theft and other petty crime appear to be contributing factors to this drop in perceived safety. Other research has also emphasised the importance of reliable public transport and readily available taxis — particularly for those who use the City outside of core working hours. These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to improve safety and comfort during the evening and nighttime economy, especially if the City is to be positioned as a thriving, round-the-clock destination.

Public Realm

In one survey, the highest-rated aspects of the City’s public realm were street cleanliness and litter control, lighting and the condition and appearance of pavements. The same survey identified three main areas of concern: a lack of outdoor seating, the visibility of rough sleeping and begging and clutter caused by piles of e-bikes and scooters obstructing pedestrian routes.

Across multiple studies, a strong and consistent theme was the desire for more green space, which is often associated with opportunities to pause, rest and connect with nature — especially through the addition of seating. Some respondents expressed a preference for a wider variety of public spaces in the City, moving beyond “manicured” landscapes toward more characterful, “rugged” and adaptable environments. Soft landscaping, planting and greenery were repeatedly cited as important factors in making a location feel appealing, welcoming and conducive to dwell time.

What are the most important factors when choosing an office?
Source: Anonymised CPA member data (2024)



Leisure, retail and after-work time

Retail choice and access to cultural or entertainment venues emerged as key areas for improvement among workers. In one study, nearly one in four respondents expressed some level of dissatisfaction with both the retail and cultural offers currently available. Yet, retail remains a valued part of the City experience. A survey of occupiers revealed that nearly 75% of respondents made use of the onsite retail offer, and around 40% identified retail as the aspect they most enjoyed about their workplace. Another study reinforced the demand for more high-quality amenities, shops and leisure activities that extend beyond working hours.

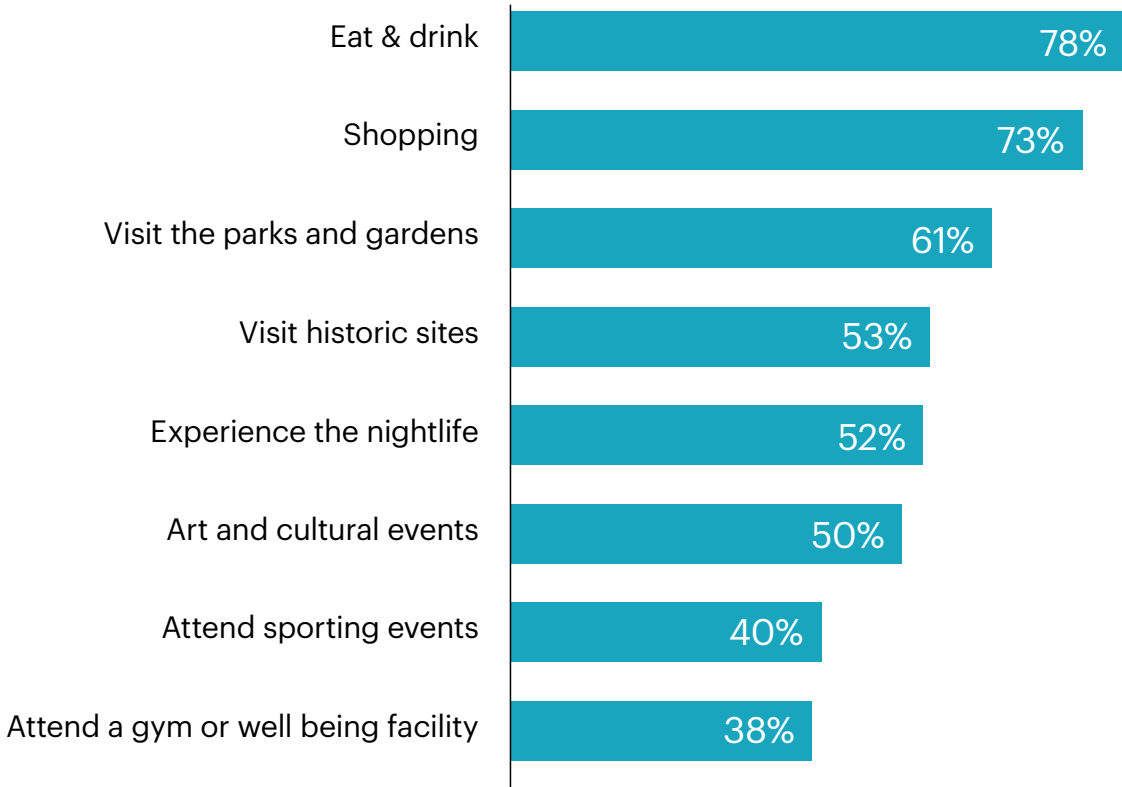
The food and beverage offer tends to receive strong satisfaction ratings. One survey reported that three in four respondents were satisfied, while another found that eating and drinking was the most popular leisure activity in the City (cited by around 80% of respondents), followed closely by shopping

(just over 70%). However, there is still demand for greater variety — particularly through the introduction of street food markets and more diverse, independent or experiential dining options.

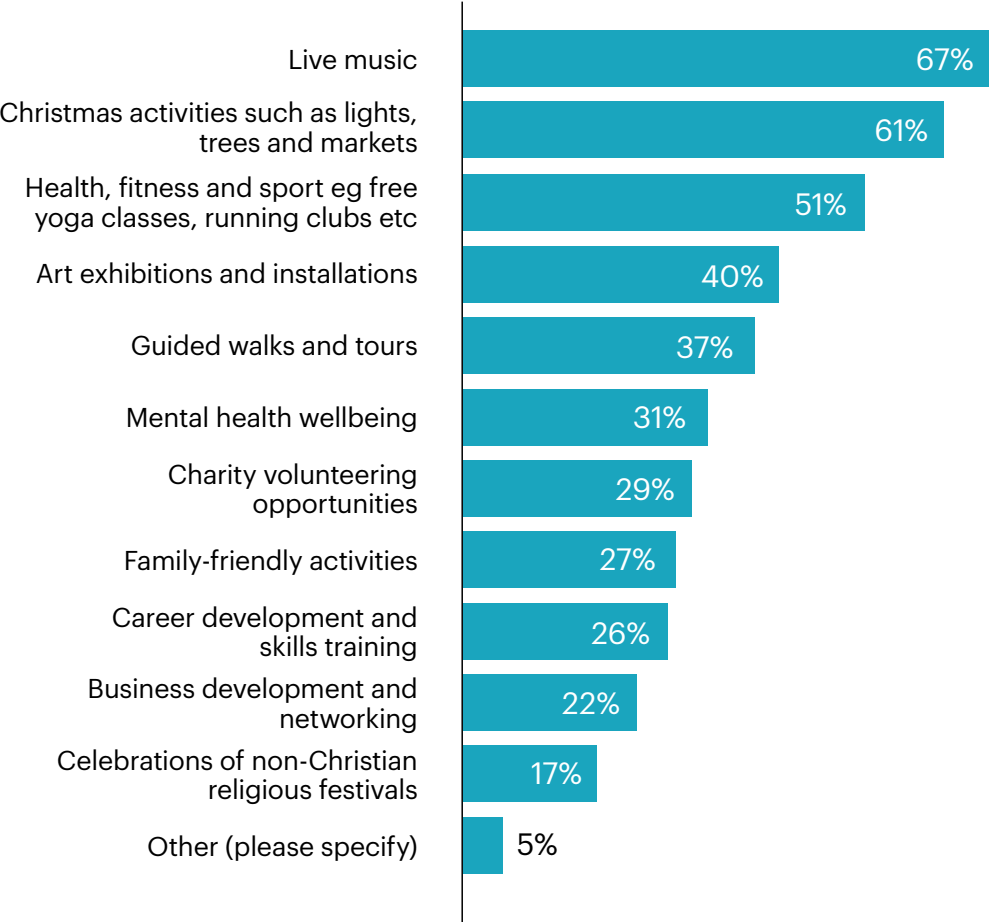
Health, fitness and wellbeing amenities are other areas of growing interest. Nearly half of respondents in one study said they would like to see more wellbeing-related facilities in the City, while occupiers in a major development survey ranked fitness and wellbeing second only to local business pop-ups in terms of desired improvements.

There is also strong interest in cultural programming and seasonal activations. Survey respondents indicated a desire for more live music (70%), Christmas-themed events (60%), health and sports activities (51%) and art-related experiences (40%).

Favourite things to do. What do respondents do when in the City of London?
Source: Vision One. (2025) NLA One City Engagement Research Management Report March 2025.



What would you like to see more of in the area?
Source: Eastern City Business Improvement District. (2025) Eastern City Business Survey 2025.



Other ideas and recommendations for improvement

Another theme emerging from the research is a desire for freer movement and greater permeability across the City. Stakeholders highlighted a preference for softening the City’s boundaries with neighbouring areas to make it feel less “fortress-like.”

Key findings point to the importance of broadening the City’s appeal by making it more pleasant to walk through, enhancing the spaces between buildings and improving access to quality experiences. In one survey, respondents expressed a desire to enjoy the sunshine, socialise with colleagues and take time away from their desks — reinforcing the need for more welcoming, people-focused public spaces.

Overall, workers and business people view the City positively. Improvements could be made in aspects related to personal safety, the public realm and the retail and entertainment offer. Much work is already underway, but limited resources and competing priorities mean not every demand can be met. Trade-offs — such as balancing vibrancy with safety or greenery with space constraints — will be necessary.

Still, by focusing on the basics — cleanliness, safety and comfort — while enhancing after-hours activity and the public realm, the Destination City programme can strengthen the City’s appeal as a place to work and spend time.

City voices

Sophie Morgan

Company: Landsec
Role: CPA NextGen Chair and Senior Development Manager
Sector: Developer with a commercial portfolio in City of London
Company size: Over 600 employees, with 500 located in Victoria, London



What do you enjoy most about being in the Square Mile?
I really love that the Square Mile has something for everyone. You get a sense that you are in a business capital of the world; blended with a unique and rich history and heritage which is really special.

How easy is it to spend time outside in the City? Do you ever take breaks, meet people, or socialise outdoors?
There are more and more spaces to dwell outside popping up around the City, with improved pedestrian areas and seating. The City has a lot of hidden spaces which are fun to discover, but it would be great to make more of a showcase of what the City has to offer.

How would you describe the street-level experience here — the shops, cafés, culture, green spaces?
The shift to more diverse and independent ground floor offer is great. The opening of Boxhall earlier this year and spaces like Broadworks offer unique and vibrant experiences which seem to really be resonating with occupiers.

What changes would help make the City feel more inclusive, welcoming and enjoyable day to night?
Safety plays a big part in this and the City has many positive initiatives such as its Taxi Marshalling Scheme. Extending activity into the evenings for more passive surveillance would also help here, whilst contributing to a more attractive and vibrant City.

Jo Scott

Company: Aspen Insurance
Role: Head of Corporate Communications
Sector: Insurance
Company size: 570 employees in City of London



What do you enjoy most about being in the Square Mile?
I love the Square Mile’s energy — fast-paced, focused and full of purpose. There’s a unique mix of sociability and hard work, with people from all over the world who are bold, innovative and committed. The vibrancy and drive of the City have always inspired me.

When you think about the public spaces — streets, squares, parks, viewing galleries — how well do they work for you?
They’ve improved a lot over the years, but the City’s layout is still pretty labyrinthine, so many spaces feel hidden or tricky to find. Even after decades working here, I keep discovering gardens and pedestrianised areas I didn’t know about. Some viewing galleries are hard to access too. Having a single, clear source of information about spaces and events would really help people make the most of what’s on offer.

How do you feel about the City outside working hours — is it a place you’d stay and enjoy socially?
The City’s nighttime economy is fantastic, with brilliant restaurants and bars that make socialising a big part of working life. In my line of work, building relationships goes beyond the office, so socialising is essential. Post-pandemic, it’s clear how important it is to connect in person. When I first arrived, the City felt exclusive and male-dominated — pubs weren’t welcoming for women alone. Now, it’s much more inclusive and inviting, with a completely different, warmer vibe that I really enjoy after work.

If the Square Mile could offer one thing to make your experience better, what would it be?
I’d love one central place — maybe a website or newsletter — that tells me where to go for whatever I need. Something that shares what’s new, upcoming events, how to access spaces like viewing galleries and all that good stuff in one easy spot. It’d make navigating the City’s offerings so much simpler.

Howard Taylor

Company: Eastcheap Records
Role: Co-Founder & Director
Sector: Food & drink, culture and entertainment
Location: 20 Eastcheap
Company size: 29 employees in City of London



What made you choose to set up in the City?
It was a long-held ambition to set up in the City of London due to its beautiful architecture, rich history and unique energy as the financial hub of Europe. That, combined with the City of London Corporation's permissive licensing regime, made it possible for operators like us to open new venues in the area.

What do you enjoy most about being in the Square Mile?
The unique history and variety of places to visit, whether it's a 200 years old pub, a Christopher Wren church or a modern viewing platform in a skyscraper.

What do you think is missing from the City at street level? What would make it more vibrant or welcoming?
Pavement widening, more greening and a rebalancing of the street in favour of businesses and pedestrians rather than motor vehicles. Converting parking spaces into outdoor seating areas would also allow people to better enjoy the City's hospitality offerings, especially in the summer.

How would you describe the street-level experience here — the shops, cafés, culture, green spaces?
The architecture is great, but there's a distinct lack of outdoor seating to enjoy these venues in the summer. There also aren't enough green spaces or trees in the urban environment — and this is something simple that could be done to greatly improve the overall impression for visitors.

Mark Higgs

Company: Freshfields LLP
Role: Chief Operating Officer
Sector: Law
Location: 100 Bishopsgate
Company size: 2,000 employees in City of London



What do you enjoy most about being in the Square Mile?
The vibrancy and sheer scale of activity here. You really feel part of something significant — the economic heartbeat of the country and one of the major financial centres in the world. That buzz, that sense of being connected to something so significant, is exciting. It attracts a lot of brilliant people, and that's a huge part of the appeal.

How would you describe the street-level experience here — the shops, cafés, culture, green spaces?
Honestly, I think we've outgrown what's on offer. I've lived in Singapore and Sydney, where communal food courts are common, popular meeting spots — everyone goes, there's variety, it's easy. We don't have that here. It's mostly chains with long queues, and if you want something more interesting, you've got to walk to Shoreditch. The offer doesn't match the scale and calibre of the businesses now based here. We're attracting world-class firms, but the amenities on offer haven't kept pace.

If the Square Mile could offer one thing to make your experience better, what would it be?
The City is steeped in history — 2,000 years of it — but I don't think we make enough of that. As someone who works here, I'm probably not going to take time out to explore all the old walls or plaques, but as a destination, we're really underplaying it. There are nods to history here and there, and the occasional guided walk, but there's so much more we could do to bring those stories to life and make them part of the City's identity.

What changes would help make the City feel more inclusive, welcoming and enjoyable day to night?
I think we need more variety in the types of places and experiences that can draw people in. Being a bit braver with road planning would help — Bank, for example, is much better now with less traffic. And then there's the river — we barely use it or even think about it. I run along it almost every day and it's a remarkable scene, but hardly anyone's there. It's difficult to access; you have to navigate busy roads and work against the flow of traffic. It is not far, but it takes effort. Making it easier to access could have an impact.

Creating a magnetic destination



From late 2024 to mid-2025, CPA engaged with representatives from the City Corporation, local BIDs and its own membership to gather insights on how this collective group and its stakeholders can respond to the challenges identified by the data analysis, and work in partnership to deliver towards the Destination City ambition to create a vibrant, magnetic destination for businesses and workers. This section summarises the findings from this engagement.

A City of London Spatial Vision

The emerging City Plan 2040, supported by a range of planning and transport strategies, help guide development and public realm projects across the Square Mile. An area-wide visual plan was requested to bring together key priorities, programmes and spatial policies into a single, coherent blueprint. This would not only help identify strategic opportunities but also support partnership working and coordinated delivery across the Square Mile.

Participants noted that a strategic vision for growth would make it easier to communicate a shared vision with a wider network of stakeholders — which ranges from local businesses and developers to cultural institutions and strategic partners. Property owners have showed a clear appetite to collaborate more closely, recognising that a unified approach and closer coordination of public and private projects — albeit complex and sometimes challenging — would pave the way for holistic thinking that transcends red lines and legal boundaries.

The City is often seen as a single, uniform destination, rather than a mosaic of distinct neighbourhoods with their own character. To better reflect this diversity, the City Corporation is encouraged to collaborate closely with the BIDs to promote the unique identity of each area and reveal the Square Mile's richness beyond its commercial core. A more varied approach to public realm design, character and programming can help express and amplify local distinctiveness—creating places where people feel a sense of belonging. In doing so, the City can be reimagined not as a single destination, but as a dynamic network of interconnected experiences within a shared geographic footprint.

Meanwhile uses

Meanwhile uses was highlighted as an example where a coordinated approach could deliver more effective and impactful results. The challenge around meanwhile uses is when popular interventions are dismantled to make way for permanent development, thereby removing a cherished asset from the community. With a City-wide strategy in place, there is scope to sustain a dynamic network of meanwhile opportunities that is continually evolving as new spaces become available.

Governance

Greater clarity around the Destination City governance, roles and responsibilities will help support a more collaborative and transparent way of working — one in which priorities and the spatial vision are shaped through open dialogue. Strengthening communication between the City Corporation, BIDs and developers would help align efforts and build trust.

Public realm status

Participants suggested that a dedicated Destination City Champion is appointed within the City Corporation — someone who can advocate for high-quality, people-focused spaces and help elevate public realm considerations to the top of the growth agenda.

A broader theme that emerged was the need to make the City’s public realm feel more welcoming and lived-in. Participants described a long-standing issue of spaces feeling overly polished — dominated by granite setts and hard surfaces — and called for softer, more tactile environments that invite interaction. There is a strong desire for green, engaging and characterful places that encourage people to linger and explore.

There was also strong support for learning from global exemplars such as Barcelona’s Superblocks and Paris’s pedestrianisation and greening schemes — both of which have significantly enhanced environmental quality and urban liveability. Participants urged the City Corporation to adopt similarly bold strategies to reimagine its public realm and evolve into a destination that attracts a more diverse audience. It was also suggested that a workshop series for City planners could be organised by CPA to share knowledge and experience around best practice.

Elevated public space

Developers broadly agreed that public realm investment is most impactful at ground level, where it can create inclusive and welcoming spaces that are accessible and visible to all. However, in a dense urban environment like the City, where ground-level space is limited, upper-level viewing galleries are recognised as a valuable and unique resource.

Despite significant investment in creating these publicly accessible viewing platforms, galleries and terraces, developers noted that restrictions — particularly around commercialisation — limit their use. Some



London Wall Place © Make Architects



Aldgate Square © City of London Corporation

property owners reported of regulations prohibiting static furniture, and the serving of refreshments. Without amenities to encourage people to linger, visitors often move on quickly. In some cases, long queues deter, especially for local workers hoping to use the spaces during lunch breaks or shorter windows of free time. Developers welcomed further strategic dialogue with the City as to how each scheme, existing or proposed, could contribute to the continued delivery of Destination City initiatives.

This approach could deliver greater collective impact, aligning investment with the broader Destination City vision. Both developers and the City Corporation would gain assurance that each pound spent is being channelled into projects that maximise public benefit and long-term value.

Payments in lieu for public benefit

Developers raised the question of whether onsite amenities — including elevated public space, greening and biodiversity — could instead be offset through contributions to public benefit initiatives elsewhere in the Square Mile, identified by the strategic vision. Drawing on the well-established sequential test used for affordable housing, which evaluates delivery of the public benefit on site, off site or as a payment in lieu, developers suggested that pooled contributions from multiple developments could fund more ambitious, City-wide projects, such as green corridors, culture or larger public spaces.

Digital wayfinding

Improved wayfinding was highlighted as a key priority to make the Square Mile more legible, welcoming and accessible. While the Legible London scheme is effective for guiding people from A to B, participants saw an opportunity for a complementary, digital wayfinding system. This could highlight quieter routes, green corridors and destinations of all scales — from hidden courtyards to cultural landmarks.

Such a system would strengthen the visibility of the City's heritage assets and cultural organisations, enriching the journey through curiosity and discovery. Enhancing three-dimensional wayfinding — particularly to elevated public spaces like Exchange Square, the Barbican podiums and London Wall Place — was also seen as essential. Participants further suggested integrating storytelling elements to deepen appreciation of the City's unique character and history.



Exchange Square © DSDHA

Communication and audiences

Participants questioned whether communication and branding issues are limiting the impact of current initiatives in the City. They emphasised the importance of understanding public perception — how the City is being communicated, and how those messages are resonating with key audiences. While the One City platform offers a curated cultural snapshot, it currently lacks a comprehensive event calendar, and participants called for clearer, more accessible information to help workers and visitors understand what's happening and where to go, particularly after work hours, when people are actively seeking destinations and activities.

As part of its new Cultural Strategy, the City of London Corporation is working with The Audience Agency to gather deeper insights and identify data gaps. One significant gap is the limited understanding of City workers, who are often treated as a uniform group. In reality, this audience is highly diverse, with varied interests, working patterns and

engagement needs. More nuanced audience segmentation is needed — not just for workers, but for underrepresented groups such as young people under 16. This will help shape more inclusive and responsive initiatives and programmes.

Discussions also touched on the importance of embracing the wider community beyond the Square Mile. Participants urged the City to develop a stronger offer for families — for example, summer holiday provision for children — to help alleviate the pressure on parents who might otherwise work from home.

Finally, the City BID's are collaborating on a "test to invest" approach, trialling live music and performance programming to explore what resonates. The long-term ambition is to embed these cultural activations into a sustained offer, but success will depend on securing collective investment and funding models that support delivery across all partners.

Measuring success

Participants supported the development of a shared framework for monitoring progress against a set of clearly defined success metrics, based on key milestones and performance indicators co-developed by City of London Corporation in collaboration with BID's, local stakeholders and delivery partners. This would enable ongoing evaluation, transparency and accountability across all partners involved in delivering the Destination City programme.

For consistency, this framework would ideally build on the City Corporation's existing measures of success — such as attracting new investors and occupiers and increasing footfall Friday to Monday. Crucially, impact should be assessed against an agreed baseline, which might involve consolidating and aligning existing data sources, including the perception surveys and baseline studies already undertaken by the BID's. A unified approach would enable a more robust understanding of what's working, where

interventions are most needed and how to direct investment for the greatest collective benefit.

Such a framework would also provide an evidence base for storytelling, advocacy and funding bids, strengthening the case for continued investment in the City's transformation.



Mapping the opportunity

In pursuit of a Destination City spatial vision, CPA and DSDHA mapped the existing and future public realm — open spaces, connectivity and amenities — alongside new and approved development projects. First presented in the Visualising Destination City report (2023), this paper introduces an updated version of that map, reflecting both established and newly identified strategic opportunities drawn from the City Corporation's most recent planning documents.

Conceived as a roadmap for growth and a catalyst for collective action around a shared vision, the map lays the foundation for a City-wide spatial vision that recognises the vital role of the public realm in shaping a vibrant, year-round destination.

The City Corporation is actively reimagining the public realm in collaboration with BIDs, developers and other stakeholders — leveraging the planning process to deliver inclusive new public spaces and enhance existing ones. This work contributes to a more coherent network of routes and spaces that connect key destinations across the Square Mile via cultural, commercial and green corridors. Improving the movement network and ground-level experience is essential to support the City's growing daily population of 670,000 workers, as well as its residents and rising visitor numbers.

Strategic initiatives include the creation of green corridors that knit together existing green spaces — including Sites of Importance to Nature Conservation (SINCs) — with key

destinations across the Square Mile. The proposed routes on this map are indicative, highlighting opportunities to integrate both ground level and elevated gardens as well as transforming streets into linear green spaces.

“As an ecosystem, the City is undergoing a human-scale urban renaissance with its alleys and cool routes offering respite from congestion in summer, along with the ongoing creation of new open spaces, improved biodiversity and wider walkways.”

– Deborah Saunt, CPA Board, Chair of the Destination City Working Group & Founding Director, DSDHA

The City Riverfront presents one of the greatest opportunities for public realm transformation and cultural programming in the Square Mile. Once a bustling hub of trade, commerce and industry, much of this activity has since moved elsewhere. Yet, the riverfront remains a vital part of the City's identity — a place where its layered history meets opportunities for renewal, public life and cultural expression. A prominent, south-facing location with several vacant buildings and construction sites, it offers the potential for a generous, connected public space stretching from London Bridge to Tower Bridge, coordinated across multiple development plots. Home to many small event venues and heritage buildings, it has the opportunity to become a focal point for public life — centred on recreation, cultural events, arts and play — and a traffic free breathing space in the busy City environment. The Culture Planning Framework (2024) suggests a large-scale cultural anchor on the riverfront as well as meanwhile uses to test programmes and activities.

The riverfront's connection to the City gradually diminished with the introduction of major infrastructure routes such as the Thames Embankment and Lower and Upper Thames Street. Realising its full potential now depends on restoring north-south permeability and widening the riverside walk to significantly improve accessibility and reconnect the City with its historic waterfront.

Finally, the map recognises the Square Mile's 'halo effect' — its strong connectivity and positive influence on neighbouring areas — which focuses on softening the City's edges and strengthen links, making it more permeable and integrated with its wider context.



City Riverfront © Simon Kennedy Photography

Recommendations

The following section summarises the key recommendations distilled from the findings of this report. They are articulated to be complementary to existing City policies and strategies and seek to facilitate the implementation of the Destination City programme.

Delivering the Destination City Vision



A Square Mile Spatial Vision

A spatial vision for the Square Mile — led by the City Corporation and co-created with key delivery partners — would provide a platform for articulating a shared vision, aligning strategic objectives and enabling coordinated delivery. By establishing consensus around key projects and investment priorities, the vision would support the pooling of resources (see the Funding section below) toward high-impact initiatives, rather than diluting efforts across many locations. This targeted approach would amplify the effectiveness of investments, foster collaboration and accelerate meaningful progress.

A Destination City Champion

A dedicated Destination City Champion within the City Corporation would play a vital role in elevating public realm priorities across departments and partnerships. This individual would be well-positioned to drive forward ideas, navigate practical barriers and secure buy-in from key stakeholders. With a deep understanding of both the strategic ambitions and the operational challenges, a Destination City Champion can ensure that public space considerations remain central to planning and development discussions — helping to coordinate efforts, align priorities and deliver impactful, people-focused outcomes across public and privately owned land.



Herbalist's Press by FSQ, London Festival of Architecture © NLA and Luke O'Donovan

A convivial public realm

There is a strong desire to make the City's public realm feel more welcoming, characterful and lived-in. Stakeholders have called for softer, more tactile environments that invite interaction and encourage people to linger and explore. Thoughtful, nature-filled public spaces that are rich in visual interest and variety can make the City feel more inclusive, engaging and human.

Digital wayfinding

A digital wayfinding system for Destination City could help guide people to the Square Mile's quieter lanes, green corridors and cultural landmarks — drawing attention to destinations of all scales, from hidden gardens to major institutions. Designed to complement the Legible London scheme, it should encourage exploration and curiosity, making the City easier to navigate and more inviting to all. Improved three-dimensional wayfinding should be explored to better connect elevated public spaces. There is also potential to introduce more interpretive digital elements to deepen public appreciation of the City's rich heritage, layered histories and evolving character.

Leadership and partnership



Governance

Greater clarity around the Destination City governance, roles and responsibilities will help support a more collaborative and transparent way of working — one in which priorities and the spatial vision are shaped through open dialogue. Strengthening communication between the City Corporation, BIDs and developers would help align efforts and build trust. There is also a clear appetite for deeper engagement and participation, for example through CPA and other forums, that can offer valuable opportunities to surface shared challenges, identify opportunities and work collectively toward unlocking the City’s full potential.

A lively street level

Supporting a vibrant ground-level experience means rethinking policies to better reflect current market and stakeholder demand. Additionally, a strategic network of assets for meanwhile use can offer low-risk opportunities to test ideas and activate spaces that are end-of-life, in hiatus or in transition. With supportive planning policies and assistance from the City Corporation — alongside activation pots and flexible lease terms — a livelier and diversified offer can emerge, attracting a broader audience. Introducing a matchmaking service to connect grassroots organisations with BIDs and local businesses could further unlock potential sites for temporary activation.

Balance of policy consideration

The City’s property sector is working with planning officers to deliver magnetic places across the Square Mile. The impetus from Destination City provides a unique opportunity to further strengthen our collaboration and direct the public benefits from this pro-growth agenda into the spaces and places desired by workers – such as public realm and the City’s cultural offer. We should work together to ensure that the City’s much-loved elevated public spaces (viewing galleries, terraces and gardens within buildings) where required, are engaging, activated and impactful.

Measuring success

Understanding how the City is perceived — and how its messaging resonates with different audiences, including those who don’t currently visit — is essential. More nuanced audience segmentation can help reflect the diversity of City workers and inform more targeted engagement. A new Destination City Dashboard, as recommended by the Paul Martin independent review (2024), is supported to bring together market research on visitor origin, attitudes, experiences and spending. This would support a partnership-led approach to data processing, enabling BIDs, cultural institutions and the City Corporation to share insights and build a more complete, actionable picture. The dashboard could also support a framework for tracking progress against shared success metrics, co-developed with local stakeholders and delivery partners. Building on the City Corporation’s existing performance measures, it could guide more focused, evidence-based investment.

Funding



Innovative funding models

A City of London Infrastructure Fund, drawing upon proven models such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF), Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and international best practices exemplified by New York City, offers a compelling pathway to pool funding streams and secure financing for priority projects across the Square Mile – such as major infrastructure projects, green networks, large scale public realm initiatives and climate adaptation schemes. By combining public and private capital, leveraging revenue streams and establishing clear governance frameworks, the fund would enable long-term planning and stability through strategic, multi-year investments that allow finance to be made available across more than one economic cycle. Creating this fund will require visionary leadership, legal innovation and stakeholder collaboration, but with these elements in place, the City of London has the potential to set a global benchmark for urban infrastructure financing.

Payments in lieu

Building on proposals in the emerging City Plan 2040, a public benefit offsetting system — modelled on the well-established sequential test used for affordable housing — could enable contributions from multiple developments to be pooled into a central fund and directed towards more ambitious, City-wide projects on both public and private land. By coordinating investment at scale, this approach would amplify collective impact and ensure alignment with the broader Destination City programme. Its success would hinge on transparency around how the fund is spent to build confidence for both developers and the City Corporation that each pound contributed delivers maximum public benefit, long-term value and a more coherent, high-quality urban environment. To support this approach, further cost-benefit analysis is recommended, with a specific focus on comparing the value of investment in onsite provision — such as viewing galleries — versus strategic ground-level public realm projects, to help ensure resources are allocated for maximum public benefit.

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