

Public London

ACTIVATING THE CITY





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Contents

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Foreword

by Benjamin O'Connor, Director, NLA



What is public space? When we talk about public realm, placemaking, and building better places... what are we actually talking about? I think it is safe to say that most people think of parks, green spaces and city squares as public spaces, but really the majority of spaces we move through on a daily basis are public and deserve the time, attention, care and funding that goes into the more obvious spaces we dwell in. These include the underpasses, street spaces, interstitial spaces between buildings and all other spaces you inhabit from the moment you open your front door, step off your tube, train or bus, until you sit at your desk. These are the spaces that we need to be thinking of when we talk about public realm strategies and making spaces better for people.

The essence of these spaces of course lies in the people who inhabit them. How can we ensure that their needs and desires are integrated into the projects we undertake? Over the past two decades, there has been a significant shift towards creating people-centric places, beginning with the transformation of Trafalgar Square's north side into a pedestrian-friendly zone in 2003. This landmark intervention marked a turning point, soon followed by the inaugural London Festival of Architecture in 2004, which has since highlighted numerous projects exemplifying an increasing commitment to quality and a people-first approach in public spaces. From small-scale local initiatives championed by LFA to major developments in London and beyond, these examples showcase best practice in the design and delivery of our public spaces.

Our goal with Public London is to provide a comprehensive guide that aligns with the mission of the NLA community as laid out in the New London Agenda¹. By bringing people together, we aim to shape better places that meet the evolving needs of their inhabitants. Through this publication, we will explore successful projects and strategies, serving as a testament to the power of thoughtful design in the urban landscape.

The city as a festival, the Festival as a city

by Rosa Rogina, Director, London Festival of Architecture



For many people London's architecture is synonymous with its changing skyline, but what is happening down at the ground that is holding it all up? In a city that is home to an extraordinary mix of cultures and communities, its open and in-between spaces—however big or small, planned or accidental, situated centrally or on the outskirts—should be central to the evolution and the development of the city. And while the world we live in today is in many aspects very different from the world of twenty years ago, the London Festival of Architecture continues to anchor architectural discourse in everyday environments, capturing people's imagination on their way to work or as they are returning home from a local market.

Short-term, low cost, big impact, scalable solutions for collective action; the Festival acts as an open framework for the public and the profession to experiment, test ideas and negotiate change. To unlock a truly open, collectively accessible public London we need to roll up our sleeves and open our creative minds to the richness of urban life, however complex it may be. Public London invites us to look out for the ordinary and the extraordinary, and to never stop striving for a better city. It is a call for all of us to come together to unlock greener, healthier, and more equitable alternatives for our city—a London by, and for, all Londoners.

20 years of public realm activation

by Peter Murray OBE, Co-Founder, NLA



When the 2004 London Architecture Biennale grassed over St John Street and drove a small herd of Longhorn cattle towards Smithfield Market it aimed to highlight two themes. First was the historic formation of the widened street, which for centuries had been used by drovers taking their stock to slaughter; the second was to illustrate how it could easily be converted into a green public space. The proposal was sadly ignored by the London Borough of Islington and St John Street remains a traffic-filled thoroughfare. However, in 2006 the Biennale recreated the St Bartholomew Fair around Smithfield Market—another historical event which delivered ideas about the future use of the area when the meat market is transferred to East London. The fair focused on the pedestrianisation of Smithfield—a proposal which has been adopted in the Hawkins\Brown Public Realm Strategy for the area which will hopefully take place once the conversion of the General Market into the London Museum is completed.

I say ‘hopefully’ because the adoption of streets as traffic-free public spaces is fraught with political danger. The City of London has been planning the improvement of Bank Junction for the last decade. The aim was for it to be safer and a place where people would not only pass through but also dwell. The junction has been redesigned, and through traffic during the day is restricted to buses and bicycles.

At the time of going to press the Court Common Council is scheduled to vote on a motion to allow taxis back into the junction between 7am and 7pm (they are permitted to do so outside those hours). This would be a backward step, particularly in light of the

Corporation’s Destination City strategy to encourage more people to visit the Square Mile as part of its post-COVID recovery and as a response to the increased number of days of the week people are working from home. It will also be damaging to the City’s global reputation.

Authorities worldwide are realising that cities are for people, not cars. They prioritise human wellbeing and environmental sustainability over vehicular traffic. They are creating spaces that enhance the quality of life by making cities more walkable, bike-friendly, and rich in public transportation options.

Urban areas designed with people in mind encourage social interaction and community engagement. These cities are implementing car-free zones, bike lanes, and efficient public transit systems to reduce reliance on automobiles, thus decreasing traffic congestion, pollution, and noise levels.

Prioritising people over cars also supports local economies. Pedestrian-friendly areas typically attract more foot traffic, benefitting local businesses and creating vibrant, economically resilient communities. Such designs promote public health by encouraging physical activity and reducing air pollution, which is linked to various health issues.

This report includes projects reflecting a human-centred approach to urban design, creating a more sustainable, liveable, and equitable city, aligning with broader environmental conservation and social wellbeing goals. These changes to the city often take a long time and meet substantial political opposition, which can create setbacks, but things are going in the right direction, as illustrated by wonderful, groundbreaking projects like the Strand Aldwych improvements and the West End Project.

Looking back

LFA London Festival of Architecture

The London Festival of Architecture (LFA) is a month-long celebration of architecture and city-making, taking place every June across London. Since its origins in 2004, the Festival's mission has always been to open up discussions around architecture, test new ideas and uncover and promote new talent.

Over the years LFA have helped deliver some of the most striking and impressive projects in London, ranging from permanent improvements to the public realm to temporary festival pop ups. These installations are one of the exciting ways LFA creates positive change in the city, helping facilitate urban innovation and experimentation within the city. By posing design challenges and giving public projects to emerging designers these projects support young talent, and create space to test out new ideas for long term improvement in the public realm.

Many of these projects have also helped launch the careers of many emerging architects and designers, helping them deliver a high-profile commission early in their practice. Our 'Open Call' model means that anyone with a passion for architecture and a good idea can propose a project or event for the LFA which can radically open up the discussion around architecture and our city.



St John's Street is transformed into a public green during LFA, and activated by local individuals and practices, to explore future possibilities for the area.
© London Festival of Architecture

LFA activates the Millennium Bridge to explore the ancient rights of Freemen to drive sheep toll-free across the bridge to the heart of the City of London.
© London Festival of Architecture



Planning permission is granted for King's Cross redevelopment, including 10 new major public spaces.

The London Plan is updated and represents a step-change in approach, serving as a blueprint for the future development.

The 'Great Outdoors' programme is launched by the GLA, to revitalise public space and improve Londoners' quality of life.



London hosts the Olympic and Paralympic Games, predominantly in the designated space in Stratford, East London. Allies and Morrison, LDA Design and Hargreaves Associates for London Legacy Development Corporation
© Neil Mattinson



The lack of spaces of rest in the city is explored during LFA, through a series of city bench interventions. 'Here Lies...' by Patrick McEvoy pays tribute to a fictional dachshund, and interacts with the City's Roman heritage.
© Agnese Sanvito

London celebrates the 50th anniversary of the London boroughs, and its population hits 8.6m (highest since 1939).

NLA launches the first edition of *Public London*, looking at 10 years of transformation of public spaces.

COVID-19 hits the UK and London goes into lockdown and begins rethinking outdoor spaces and individual streets can be used as spaces of gathering and community.

The Commission for Diversity in the Public Realm is established by the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan to review and assess public tributes including statues and other landmarks.



The Strand Aldwych and Alfred Place are completed, two new major public realm improvements reclaiming roads for people.
LDA Design for London Borough of Camden
© Morley von Sternberg

The second edition of the 'Pews and Perches' competition invited architecture and design students, and emerging practitioners to deliver a new take on street furniture that celebrate the Royal Docks and its local communities.

'Over Here', a multi-coloured bike rack by Iain Jamieson and Zoë Power explores the increasing need for 'Pop Up Bike Parking' with LFA and Network Rail.

The Mayor of London introduces a 'Rewild London Fund' to restore and create wildlife habitats across the capital.



Battersea Power Station opens to the public after decades of sitting derelict. LDA Design and WilkinsonEyre for Battersea Power Station Development Company
© Battersea Power Station Development Company / Charlie Round-Turner

'All Change at Bank' reprioritises space for people walking, wheeling and cycling at Bank Junction alongside an enhanced public realm.

Launch of the '100 Public Spaces Programme' by the Greater Authority of London (GLA), aiming to create or upgrade one hundred public spaces in London.

Trafalgar Square transformed by Foster + Partners as part of their 'World Squares for All' programme.



LFA enables the closure of Exhibition Road and works with RIBA on a series of activations rethinking the future of the street.
© London Festival of Architecture

London Low Emission Zone comes into operation.

Construction of Crossrail begins, starting with the central section and connections to existing lines that would become part of the Elizabeth line.

LFA works with Matthew Lloyd and The DisOrdinary Architecture Project to rethink access to the Duke of York steps with a water/solar-powered lift.
© Agnese Sanvito



The Mayor of London sets out the 'Smarter London Together' roadmap to plan how we transform London into the smartest city in the world.

GLA and Transport for London publish the *Healthy Streets for London* report, exploring how to improve air quality, reduce congestion and encourage more Londoners to walk, cycle and use public transport.



Dulwich Picture Gallery reveal the IF_DO Dulwich Pavilion during LFA, exploring how their public space can be rethought to increase access to cultural spaces for all.
© Agnese Sanvito

National Park City Foundation confirmed London as the world's first National Park City, being almost 50 per cent green and blue.

World-first Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) implemented in inner London, to improve air quality in the capital.

Yinka Ilori works with LFA and Wandsworth Council to overhaul a gloomy underpass into a local community asset titled 'Happy Street'.
© Luke O'Donovan



Elephant Park is completed, as a new green oasis at the heart of Elephant and Castle and an inclusive and sustainable community space.

LFA expands on the greening infrastructure on Exhibition Road with a series of interventions by Seyi Adekun and Wayward, Urban Radicals and Adam Harris, Mizzi Studio and Fran Kirk and Patrick McEvoy.

Launch of 'Views on the Atlantic', a cinema located in a disused space in Brixton, which is running a programme of films celebrating Brixton's rich history and cultural heritage for LFA2023.

EC Bid explores play in the City of London during LFA, with the 'Urban Playground' by McCloy + Muchemwa.
© Luke O'Donovan



Opening of the first new riverside space at Putney Embankment as part of the Tideway project.

LFA2024 sees the activation of an old sports pavilion and the final edition of Pews and Perches, as well as reimagines the future of square mile and wayfinding in Fitzrovia.

Placemakers Toolkit

Here we present the Placemakers Toolkit, a comprehensive guide for designing, implementing and managing public spaces. It is based on best practice, learning from the past 20 years of public realm design and activation, and echoing the 'Six Pillars of Placemaking' of the New London Agenda.

1

Balance top-down and bottom-up

Achieve healthier, more liveable public spaces by balancing big-picture strategies with hyper-local insights for holistic and practical solutions.

2

Co-create

Engage with communities from the outset to create spaces where people feel comfortable and develop a sense of ownership. This approach will inspire long-term community care.

3

Embrace diversity

Celebrate local cultures through artistic diversity and activation, to break monocultural uniformity, acknowledge different perspectives, and foster inclusive public spaces.

4

Focus on impact

Acknowledge the potential of small interventions with imperfect and playful design aesthetics. Whether temporary or permanent, these efforts will create high-impact, dynamic places with a bigger draw.

5

Test and try

Unlock opportunities for experimentation and innovation in the public realm with meanwhile projects. Temporary initiatives serve as testbeds, constituting the initial step in a larger process of change.

6

Open streets for people

Remap streets to favour cyclists and pedestrians, and introduce greater flexibility in shared street usage, prioritising air quality, green spaces, health and wellbeing.

7

Rewild

Define an area-wide strategy to guide individual projects in contributing to a greater environmental outcome. Address nature inequality through biodiversity net gain and the amplification of green spaces.

8

Reuse and repurpose

Design spaces and built objects with a circular approach from the early concept stage, focusing on adaptive, reversible, reusable and recycled solutions.

9

Partner up

Align ambitions between the public and private sectors in terms of funding, effort, skills, and a clearly articulated vision to create successful and lasting places.

10

Care and conserve

Adopt a long-term stewardship approach to care for places over time. This involves allocating budgets for maintenance, upkeep, and place curation for decades into the future.

Introduction

The past two decades have been a time of enormous change in London. Amidst the political uncertainty of the financial crisis and Brexit, the city remains a global stronghold with a steadily growing population since 1991² and 8.9 millions of people living in the city in 2022. Whole city districts have emerged and matured, adding to the capital's multi-nodal structure and weaving new **civic landscapes** into the urban grain. Both the grand gestures of comprehensive redevelopments and the more granular, local projects have revitalised established neighbourhoods and offered new ways of working collaboratively towards a greater vision. And with the climate and biodiversity emergencies firmly on our radar, interventions on all scales have become tuned towards creating a more liveable city where people and nature can thrive.

In the same time period, the world has become increasingly digitised and our social lives have migrated online. Whilst communication technologies enable us to stay connected, they have also led to a decline in face-to-face interaction, placing an emphasis on our **public realm** as a platform for real-life encounters. This was intensely felt as digitisation accelerated during the COVID-19 lockdowns and feelings of isolation were on the rise; having been confined to our homes and denied time together reinforced the value of the public realm as a common ground and a canvas for life.

Investment in quality public spaces may seem like a generous gesture, but it is underpinned by a strong commercial imperative; a desirable public realm is linked to increased property values, uplifts in commercial revenue and boosted private sector investment. It is an expenditure that yields multifold returns, benefitting everyone from the developer to local communities.

In conversation with some of the pioneering change-makers of today, this essay contemplates what constitutes a successful and democratic public realm today, the role of **co-creation** and partnerships, and how we can ensure that places are fit-for-purpose in the long-term.

Common ground

Inclusive and equitable spaces for everyone

The public realm is the lifeblood of the city—an open and common ground where the everyday plays out. Core to its success is its democratic nature, which builds on co-creation and representative designs that allow everyone to feel free to be themselves.

LFA HIGHLIGHT

Seats at the Table

The DisOrdinary Architecture Project and Re-Fabricate for the City of London and Foundation for Future London, LFA2023

Seats at the Table was a temporary installation focused on inclusive and equitable public space in the City of London as part of LFA2023. At its core was a desire to challenge design norms, how we use public spaces and our ways of moving around the city.

Seats are often standardised, but for this project, the team collaborated and co-designed the seats with disabled artists and architects as well as Special Education Needs (SEN) and mainstream schools to create a myriad of options that considered a broader range of requirements. Aural, tactile and visual sensory additions were integrated into the design to accommodate different ways of navigating space.

This discussion was continued and extended beyond the LFA intervention in the 'Many more parts than M!' compendium, which was released a few months later, with the ambition to continue conversations beyond the meanwhile intervention.

The learning from this project will inform the permanent design of the new public realm in Smithfield area.



One size doesn't fit all

According to UN-Habitat research³, well-functioning cities have around 50 per cent of their surface area dedicated to **public space**. These spaces play a crucial role in facilitating social interaction, stimulating local economies, and fostering cultural expression, and should be designed with everybody in mind. Public realm has a responsibility to be democratic and support a diverse population irrespective of age, ethnicity, cultural background, disability, neurodiversity, gender identity and sexuality.

A common ground doesn't necessarily equate to a neutral design. The definition of an equitable space differs from person to person and perceptions of belonging and safety vary. There may be an established idea of a uniform public realm aesthetic that is cost-effective, easy to maintain and safe, but generic spaces can also exclude people. True inclusivity requires a form of **placemaking** that authentically represents local cultures and communities, thereby creating a context-specific vernacular that belongs to its surroundings.



Pop Brixton by Turner Works for the London Borough of Lambeth and The Collective © Turner Works

Carl Turner, Founding Director at Turner Works, speaks of active and passive public spaces. Inspired by the edgy street culture of London, his studio delivers 'hackable' environments that invite people to make adaptations

and take ownership without the fear of messing up a perfect design—in fact, co-design can elevate a place and ground it in the community. Pop Brixton, a project designed by Turner Works in 2015 for the London Borough of Lambeth and the Collective, is an entrepreneurial community and event space in south London.

The aim of the project was less about aesthetics and more about creating a place that was right for Brixton, focusing on local people and local opportunities to establish a mini-city of culture, enterprise and community. It is a flexible place that can evolve in tune with its users and occupiers.

Friendly spaces

Placemaking is often shaped by normative design standards that can overlook the needs of children, teenagers, disabled and vulnerable people. This has generated a public realm that is inadequate for many, resulting in unequal access and exclusion. The antidote to this trend is to understand and design for diverse needs, which hinges on representation in the design team and co-creation with underrepresented groups. The wider perspective granted from such a process can generate more novel and innovative solutions that break away from the established norms, embracing the complexity of London's population.



It's so important that the public spaces are successful, because it is a way to unlock developments."

Gary McLuskey, Managing Director of Global Design, Greystar

Through user-centric designs, the public realm can be a place where people of all ages and abilities come together to roam, socialise and explore on their own terms. Playable landscapes and spaces that invite active participation can nurture connections between people—friends and strangers, young and old—to combat isolation and loneliness. There is also a need for contemplative urban landscapes where it is possible to rest and restore, or passively partake in public life.

In 2023, Urban Playground by McCloy + Muchemwa in partnership with EC Bid during the London Festival of Architecture brought unexpected play to the City of London, engaging children, families, and workers.

One of the biggest recent regeneration scheme in London is King's Cross, where public realm encompasses 40 per cent of the area. For decades, the area was defined by two major train stations and a derelict industrial district. The masterplan, by Allies and Morrison, Porphyrios Associates and Townshend Landscape Architects for King's Cross Central Limited Partnership in 2006, defined a public realm to hold the site together and integrate it into its neighbourhoods. All the public spaces form a collage of walkable, accessible and complementary spaces, mixing informal play with programmed spaces and natural landscapes, and offering different opportunities for use.



The Skip Garden, by Jan Kattein for Global Generation, in 2015 at King's Cross © Jan Kattein

Limited Partnership in 2018. In contrast to traditional playgrounds with fixed play infrastructure, all the elements were movable and transportable, allowing children to create new structures and relocate the playground as needed. The Skip Garden was an early phase of the incremental King's Cross masterplan. Designed by Jan Kattein in 2015 for educational charity Global Generation, it creatively repurposed skips into portable gardens, demonstrating innovative approaches to urban farming. The temporary gardens offered practical skills development and experiences for local children, young people, residents and families. In 2019, it gave way for new development, and now lives on as the British Library Story Garden where it continues to meet the needs of local, often disadvantaged, communities. More recently, a similar approach has been adopted in Canada Water with the Paper Garden. In 2021,

Meanwhile and pop-up uses were also deployed, from playground to temporary gardens. Play KX was a temporary free-to-access playground, by Assemble with the support of the King's Cross Central

it moved from its original location, providing community-focused green spaces and enabling placemaking in this new development area.

Meanwhile initiatives promoting food growing in public spaces have flourished, enriching urban landscapes and fostering community engagement. Waterloo City Farm, stands as a pioneer in this movement, offering city dwellers the opportunity to reconnect with agriculture and sustainability practices. Similarly, in 2015, Camley Street Natural Park in King's Cross transformed disused land into a thriving urban oasis, complete with vegetable patches and wildlife habitats. Moreover, initiatives such as the Edible Bus Stop, founded in 2010, have transformed neglected spaces into vibrant community gardens, showcasing the potential for edible landscapes to beautify urban environments while promoting food self-sufficiency and ecological awareness. These endeavours underscore London's commitment to sustainable living and community resilience.

Public London Charter

In the first edition of *Public London* in 2015, NLA and Professor Matthew Carmona at UCL's The Bartlett initiated the idea of a Public London Charter, to clarify and protect both public and private interests when a project is submitted for planning approval.

In 2021, the Mayor's Public London Charter⁴ was published to guide London's public realm towards safe, accessible and inclusive design and management. It defines eight principles that set out the rights and responsibilities for the users, owners and managers of new public spaces: public welcome; openness; unrestricted use; community focus; free of charge; privacy and data; transparency; good stewardship.



Co-creation

London is a diverse and multi-cultural city that is home to over 270 nationalities. In order to design fully inclusive places, we must take a collaborative approach, making sure that a broad spectrum of the population is heard and represented. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to engagement, but the overarching aim must be to reflect the spirit and ethos of the local community and allow them to shape the outcome.

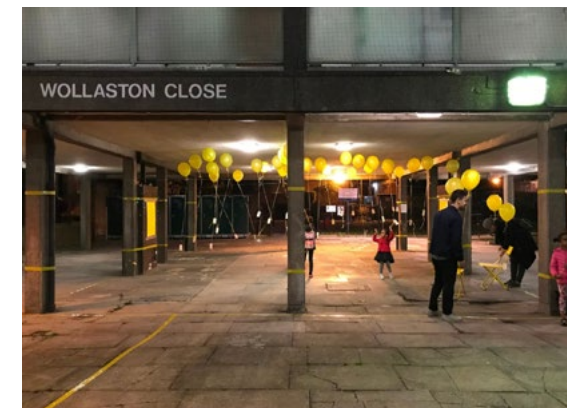
In south London, since its opening in 2021, Elephant Park by Gillespies for Lendlease has become a new focal point for urban life. People come from afar with buckets and spades and packed lunches to spend the day in this green oasis. It's a free for all space where visitors are not required to spend to stay, making it welcoming for everyone. The park was designed with the local community in mind, and since completion people have made the space their own. As a result, it is used in many different and sometimes unexpected ways and there is a real sense of belonging which feels really powerful.



'Elephant Springs' refers to water springs that bubble from rock formations in natural landscapes. Gillespies for Lendlease, 2021 © John Sturrock

Community perspectives can provide critical insights to placemakers, particularly when working in new and unknown locations. Engagement done properly takes time, money and resources, all of which are barriers to implementation. In projects with multiple stakeholder groups, it can be immensely complex to make sure everyone is heard, but it is vitally important to recognise the value that comes from iterative design conversations; when a project is finished, the community is much more likely to feel like it is theirs because they co-designed it and that inspires care for places.

Architecture practice IF_DO has developed a 'design sprint programme' for the Built Environment Trust that empowers citizens to recognise their agency in the placemaking process. The sprint sessions bring together what they call 'a collective of experts'—local experts and professional experts—to explore pertinent topics in areas of change.



'A City To Connect In', by IF_DO and The Loneliness Lab
© IF_DO

In 2019, the design sprint project 'A City To Connect In' was tailored to disrupt people's everyday lives in a way that is intriguing, provocative and curious. Together with the Loneliness Lab, a think tank funded by Lendlease, IF_DO created an installation

around the base of an Elephant and Castle estate with the aim to connect residents and get them talking. Dozens of yellow balloons with tags invited people to share their experiences of living on the estate. The incentive built on the idea that a simple interaction, when repeated, builds connection which can lead to friendship and greater community ties. It led to powerful and playful moments where people who had lived in proximity for a long time spoke for the first time.



Greenford Quay

HTA, Mae, Hawkins\Brown, SLCE and Flanagan Lawrence for Greystar, 2023

In Ealing, west London, Greenford Quay breathed new life into the derelict GlaxoSmithKline and Sunblest Bakery sites, which had been closed off to the public for decades. A majority of the public spaces were delivered with the first phase of development, creating a new public focus for the wider community: a main square and amphitheatre traverse the Grand Union Canal and a pedestrian bridge and canal-side walkways stitch the new place into the surrounding neighbourhoods.

Extensive consultation with local people and businesses helped shape the plans and a community grant scheme developed with the support of the London Borough of Ealing has empowered local community projects and initiatives, supporting residents in the borough to live their best lives.

Greenford Quay is a built-to-rent scheme, and Greystar is taking a long-term stewardship approach that will ensure that the open spaces will be cared for, curated and maintained over generations. They operate a programme of events that are free and open to everyone. Alongside summer festivals and seasonal events, there are also small and more intimate activities, such as nature walks, art classes and workshops with school children.

Viewpoint

Inclusive public spaces

by Binki Taylor, GLA commissioner for diversity in the public realm and founding partner, The Brixton Project



Events of 2020 stand as a timestamp for a collective shift in consciousness to our heightened awareness and understanding of inequality and its interconnected causes. This was the moment when the past caught up with the present, catalysing a widely felt compassionate

desire for social justice, equity, and inclusion to reframe our approach to society.

Our physical environment is critical to closing the disparity in how we experience life through our physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. How much we feel ‘at home’ or feel welcomed to belong, contribute and share in the fabric of our social life, is dependent on how our environment services our need to live healthier longer lives.

London is one of the most diverse cities in the world, with more than three hundred languages spoken every day. Yet much of our built environment reflects London’s Victorian era and the wealth the city accrued through its complex involvement in the slave trade; a narrative that has excluded the histories and cultural contribution of many communities who make London one of the world’s most sought-after cities to live, work and do business in.

Over three years the GLA Commission for Diversity in the Public Realm has overseen the development of projects, like Untold Stories, which celebrates the representation of London’s diverse population visibly in our public spaces. The success of the work has engaged over two thousand Londoners from diverse communities in sharing their histories, and cultural distinctions



Rainbow Plaques © Studio Voltaire

in projects across the capital’s landscape, creating a broader idea of what it is to be a Londoner and bringing visibility and agency to communities that have previously felt excluded from London’s visual narrative. The recent re-naming of TfL’s London Overground lines and new Rainbow Plaques created in partnership between London LGBT+ Forums Network and Studio Voltaire, initiated in 2018 and supported by The Mayor of London’s Untold Stories Fund and Wandsworth Oasis, are testament to the aims of the commission’s work. The project has delivered agency for communities who feel respected as Londoners and positively engaged in shaping London topography.

The tone of an area is carried in the spaces between buildings. The scene in which life happens and the possibilities we set for communities to thrive, live in our facades, squares, high streets, and civic spaces. In many places, poor maintenance and extended vacancy has baked disparity and disadvantage into our urban landscape rather than setting the scene for wellbeing.



Brixton Road Bridge, Brixton Arches, 2017 © The Brixton project

Brixton greets you with the road bridge ‘Come in Love Stay in Peace’ designed by Resolve Collective and chosen by the community in 2018. Less than 50 yards away the redevelopment of Brixton Arches has taken nearly 9 years to complete, replacing a vibrant local shopping area with unkempt vacant units, flyposting, and graffiti, is now overwhelmed by social challenges that make the area a hostile environment for communities.

The built environment industry carries a responsibility to design spaces that support the adjustments we need to make as the climate transitions and protects us from the impact of rapid change. Improving the quality of life now is a priority for the built environment industry—engaging, listening, and acting upon community-led solutions that seek to reverse harm, and promote a sense of optimism for future generations.

Developing London as a fair and equal city that values its diverse communities as essential to our combined history, present, and future, we need to make a visible, sustained, and authentic commitment to maintaining the environment equally across the city with public and civic space that welcomes, protects and cares for all Londoners regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or economic status.



Launched in 2021, the first ‘Your Streets Your Way’ competition was an initiative to support green recovery from the pandemic. The competition enables local residents to design new public spaces across Lambeth. In 2023, the London Borough of Lambeth launched the second edition of the competition.

Healthy, happy streets

Rethinking streetscapes and making space for people

COVID-19 has rebooted how we think about our streets, and with post-pandemic London being quieter than previously, there is an opportunity to reallocate street space in favour of people, signalling that streets are also a space for them.

LFA HIGHLIGHT

Phoenix Road Performing Gardens, Somers Town Acts Nooma Studio, LFA2023

In 2022, Nooma Studio installed a sensory street garden for events and performances in Somers Town to celebrate the spirit of the local community, and act as a test bed for how the street/area could become a safer, more inclusive and greener part of the city for all residents. Phoenix Road Performing Gardens Somers Town Acts established three timber pavilions that functioned as podiums for talks, performance and storytelling, inviting residents and passers-by to take to the stage or observe an act.

A community meal with smoothie-making bikes brought the people of Somers Town together and sparked moments of exchange. When the installation was dismantled it was relocated to community and private gardens as well as the local school, allowing the incentive to live on in a different form.

The project was used as a case study for transforming the area into a greener and healthier place, encouraging residents to embrace their role as active citizens, celebrate their local area and its people, and play a key role in discussions about the future of their community.



Rethinking priorities

Streets make up around 80 per cent of London's public space and present an extraordinary opportunity for reinvention. In central London, half of traffic movement is non-essential, even with the introduction of the congestion charge and the Ultra Low Emissions Zone (ULEZ) which was extended across all London boroughs in August 2023. There is a long-standing presumption that vehicles take priority and other activities fit around them but this is changing, much due to the pandemic, which remapped streets in favour of cyclists and pedestrians.

In response to COVID-19, the London Streetspace Plan⁵, implemented by the Mayor and Transport for London (TfL), delivered temporary cycle lanes for major routes and on-street car parking was commandeered to create wider pavements. Whilst society is reverting back to pre-pandemic routines, the temporary safety measures implemented during the pandemic have shifted the way we think about our streets.

“The priority for transport policy in a progressive city is air quality, health and wellness plus effective public transport and active travel — making a greater provision for public spaces, greening, dwelling and enjoyment. Road user charging would help to reduce non-essential traffic, but such a proposal is likely to lead to great protests, but for many it is more important to have access to clean air and for our children and vulnerable people to be able to move around in the city safely.”

Roy McGowan, Managing Director,
Momentum Transport Consultancy

The Mayor of London's ambition to put people and their health at the forefront is reflected in TfL's **Healthy Streets** Approach⁶ launched in 2017, which seeks to reduce traffic, air pollution and noise whilst supporting more active lifestyles and modes of transportation. The approach is exemplified in the Oxford Street



Barcelona Superblock, 2024 © Maria Dias

programme led by Westminster City Council in partnership with The New West End Company, at the heart of London's tourist hotspot, that will declutter and enhance the public realm between Marble Arch and Tottenham Court Road. Wider footways, amenity spaces for rest and play, more trees and planting as well as improved pedestrians crossing will make the street more welcoming and enjoyable for people.

Additional street improvements in West London include Pavilion Road, transformed into a pedestrian-friendly area in 2016, Regent Street which has seen ongoing enhancements with significant pedestrian-focused changes made in 2021, and Sloane Street, which has been progressively upgraded with key improvements completed in 2022.

London's approach is chiming with the EU's green, smart and affordable Mobility programme which prompts cities across the union to develop sustainable urban mobility plans with a focus on



muscle-powered and electric mobility to help deliver a net-zero continent by 2050.

The Barcelona Superblock is a pilot scheme aimed at reclaiming public space from vehicles and make it available for people. As one of Europe's most compact cities, Barcelona has only 6.6 sqm of green space for every inhabitant, compared to London's 27⁷ which has resulted in dire consequences for spatial justice and health. A Superblock groups nine city blocks together as an urban village and only private vehicles are allowed to enter at a maximum speed of 10km/h. The Poblenou Superblock, which was the first to be implemented, has increased public space for pedestrians by 13,350 sqm and reduced the number of vehicles by 58 per cent⁸. Noise levels have dropped, trees have been planted and the streets are now activated with play and culture. The intention is to extend the initiative across Barcelona's entire Cerdà urban grid to favour coexistence and human interaction, promote sustainable mobility, green the public realm and install new water management systems.

In North America, Open Streets⁹ are programmes that temporarily open streets to people by closing them to cars. Run by 8 80 Cities and Streets Plans since 2011, the programme shares a toolkit to encourage and increase number of initiatives in North America and Worldwide.

Streets as public space

"In the aftermath of COVID-19, London has become quieter during the week with trips levelling out at around 70–80 per cent of pre-pandemic levels", says Roy McGowan. This could be an incentive to push for the reallocation of street space more firmly away from individual cars and non-essential traffic.

Over the past 20 years, London has prioritised pedestrian-friendly infrastructure through numerous transformative schemes. In the City of London, 25 kilometres of the street network has been converted to pedestrian priority and the ambition of the 2024 City of London Transport Strategy¹⁰ is to double that to 50



Algate Square, a transformative new public space and the re-routing of the existing gyratory. By Gillespies for the City of London Corporation, 2018 © Courtesy of the City of London Corporation

kilometres. Clarisse Tavin, Group Manager of Major Projects and Programmes at the City of London Corporation says: "as part of the transformation of the City's public realm, we are looking at how streets can be greener, more accessible and inclusive, and be used flexibly taking into account different uses at different times of the day and the week. The idea is to make the City of London a destination where residents, workers and visitors enjoy social interaction and get inspired in connecting with history and contemporary cultures."

The reduction in traffic has changed how people use the streets and the City of London has become much safer; footways have been widened and raised carriageways give pedestrians precedence over cars, firmly signalling that the streets are also their space. Smart technology and data were instrumental in underpinning these changes; transport surveys revealed that approximately 80 per cent of the movement in the City of London



Regent Street, by BDP for The Crown Estate and Westminster City Council, 2021 © The Crown Estate

is pedestrian, yet only 15 per cent of the space is allocated to people, prompting a shift in approach.

Delivered in 2022, Alfred Place Gardens, once a car dominated street off Tottenham Court Road, has been reclaimed as a richly planted linear park designed improve air quality, biodiversity and access to green space. The scheme by LDA Design for the London Borough of Camden enhances the ecology of this urban spot and provide new habitats for wildlife with woodland planting and mature trees.

Other significant projects include the transformation of the old Aldgate gyratory in 2016, which turned a traffic-heavy area into a safer, more welcoming public space; and the Elephant and Castle roundabout, redesigned in 2015 to prioritize pedestrians and cyclists. The ongoing redesign of the Old Street roundabout aims to greatly enhance the pedestrian experience in this bustling area. Additionally, the Strand Aldwych project, initiated in 2021, has converted the area into a vibrant, traffic-free zone, while major improvements at Bank Junction focus on enhancing pedestrian safety and accessibility. These initiatives highlight London's commitment to improving urban liveability and prioritizing pedestrians in its urban planning.



All Change at Bank The City of London and TfL, 2024

All Change at Bank project, which is completed in the City of London in summer 2024, transforms the area above Bank Station, once seen as a key vehicle route through the City of London into a more inclusive and welcoming space. The key project objectives are to reduce casualties, reduce pedestrian crowding levels, improve air quality and improve the perception of 'place'—as a place to spend time in rather than to pass through.

By narrowing carriageways, widening pavements and extending the areas of public space, the junction has been rebalanced in favour of people walking, wheeling and cycling, changing the nature of the place.

Well-rooted

A greener city for increased climate resilience and liveability

In our quest for neatness in nature, we have designed out much biodiversity. A wilder urban ecology is the answer to support wildlife, deliver essential ecosystem services, increase liveability and meet the environmental challenges of our time.

LFA HIGHLIGHT

Union Street Urban Orchard Wayward Plants, 2010

The 2010 London Festival of Architecture saw the creation of the Union Street Urban Orchard on a disused site in south London. The project was constructed from reclaimed materials, 85 fruit trees and an abundance of plants with the help from over 100 volunteers who were taught essential carpentry and gardening skills. It was conceived as a place for exchange between residents and visitors who were invited to partake in events and workshops focused on biodiversity and urban agriculture.

At the end of the six-week project, the trees were donated to local estates and community gardens, allowing the benefits of the scheme to live on locally. The project won a special commendation from the Conservation Foundation and has set a precedent for meanwhile projects worldwide.



Greening the city

In 2019, London was named the first ever National Park City¹¹ and with a tree cover of 22 per cent today, the capital could be classified as a forest according to one United Nations definition. London National Park City is a grassroots movement that inspire everyone to make the capital greener, healthier and wilder. This involves democratising nature, and making it more accessible. In England, living with nature has become a privilege—the most affluent neighbourhoods have five times more public green space than the most deprived¹².

To combat nature inequality, the UK Government has introduced a new policy to ensure that every UK household is located within a 15-minute walking distance of green or blue space. Biodiversity Net Gain¹³ (BNG) new requirements, which were introduced in 2024, will go some way to infuse more nature into urban neighbourhoods and it will be critical that uplifts are delivered locally, in communities affected by densification, and not offset somewhere else.

“With COVID-19 there was an urgency and things got done in the public realm at great pace—things needed adapt quickly so we adapted them. I think that urgency is sometimes missing from the discussion about nature integration and its role in addressing climate change—there is so much we could be doing with a similar spirit—and the same urgency—good design is central to this but it needs the big systems of legislation, policy, insurance etc. to be nimble and move quicker too.”

Arthur Smart, Associate Director at Arup

The ambition to green cities is essential in the context of the climate and biodiversity crises that are happening worldwide, and it demands an urgency that cannot be ignored. Increasing green and blue infrastructure in the city is a cost-effective method to mitigate the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss, and in 2022, the London Mayor introduced a Rewilding Taskforce¹⁴

commissioned to explore opportunities for rewilding in the capital alongside a Rewild London Fund to support rewilding projects across the city. The restoration or creation of landscapes for wildlife and people will deliver numerous benefits, including cleaner rivers, safer air and the joy of sharing our city with animals. But rewilding requires us to overcome our habits of tidiness and embrace a wilder (and possibly unkempt) looking landscape that can support the complex ecosystems that are essential for the health of the planet, people and wildlife.



SuDS in the City of London © Simon Kennedy

Multifunctional landscapes can, if designed well, provide essential ecosystem services, such as carbon sequestration, water and air filtration, flood mitigation, temperature regulation, noise buffering, and increased resilience towards extreme weather events. Trees and soft planting attenuate solar radiation, provide shade and cool the air through evapotranspiration, reducing peak temperatures and the heat island effect—parks and green spaces can reduce

temperatures by up to 2° centigrade. Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)¹⁵, bioswales and water bodies can harvest rainwater for reuse, prevent flooding, filter water and airborne particles and provide new habitats for a range of species.

In Copenhagen, Tredje Natur architects have reimagined the Enghavepark into a climate park designed to address current and future water management challenges. Delivered in 2019 for the City of Copenhagen, HOFOR and Areal Renewal Project, the scheme is a demonstration of climate-adaptive innovation; during extreme rainfall, the park is captured in multifunctional ‘cloudburst pools’ that offer new sensory and recreational experiences that invite visitors to reflect on the climate.

Investment in quality public spaces can enhance the lives of communities; an increase in urban green space has been proven to make people healthier and happier with an estimated £2.1 billion of healthcare savings in England every year if all households had access to quality green space. In Philadelphia and New Haven in the United States, tree planting and greening correlated to a reduction in crime and vandalism. It is also known that increasing nature in cities can reduce allergies, asthma, cardiovascular disease, stress and depression, as well as improving cognitive ability.

A wilder aesthetic

In Kidbrooke in 2019, HTA in collaboration with the London Wildlife Trust for Berkeley Homes East Thames has designed an eight-hectare public space with a wild character that is rarely seen in cities.



Cator Park, Kidbrooke Village by HTA for Berkeley Homes East Thames, 2019 © Nick Harrison

Cator Park, which forms part of Kidbrooke Village masterplan, is an ecological and biodiverse mosaic of habitats and vegetation types; grassland, meadows, lakes, wetlands and tree copses combine to create a sequence of species-rich landscapes. A meandering water feature, dense with aquatic planting connect the different nature spaces. Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) wetlands reuse stormwater in systems that mimic the natural water cycle to provide effective flood mitigation and water management.

Rewilding can be contentious, because urban landscapes are traditionally highly curated and manicured. The challenge, says Arthur Smart, Associate Director at Arup, is that every inch of the city has a commercial lens put over it: “I’d like to think there are opportunities for London to become wilder or at least more successfully unkempt than it is at the moment—we all enjoy those

edge spaces, where places feel playful, more creative—where people and nature feel a bit more in balance. But we need to think more innovatively about this trade-off between the benefits that wildness clearly brings to natural systems and how these places can still be safe, secure and accessible for everyone.” Gillespies designed a bold rewilding project on a former gasworks site in Newham, prompting questions about how the local community will perceive it. Rewilded areas might be seen as scruffy and dangerous, expecting instead an ornamental and well-maintained natural environment. It is in our interest to broaden perspectives on urban nature and nurture an affinity for wilder spaces that are native (or adapted to a UK climate), lower maintenance, self-generative and more biodiverse.



Crown Estate rooftop garden, part of the Wild West End project © Wild West End

Retrofitting nature

Another conundrum lies in retrofitting public spaces within London’s tightly knit historic grain to incorporate more green spaces. Underground utilities and cables make

urban developments complex, particularly regarding trees and plantings. At Wembley Park, Quintain planted over a thousand trees, with 98 per cent surviving. Meticulous design of tree pits and the use of Silva Cell technology, allowing root structures to grow without disrupting infrastructure or paving, have contributed to this success. Additionally, Wembley Park employs a landscape technician responsible for long-term landscape maintenance, an essential component of urban greening projects.

Maintenance costs of nature spaces are a significant barrier for local authorities. Public-private partnerships are therefore essential to maintain the quality of nature spaces over time.

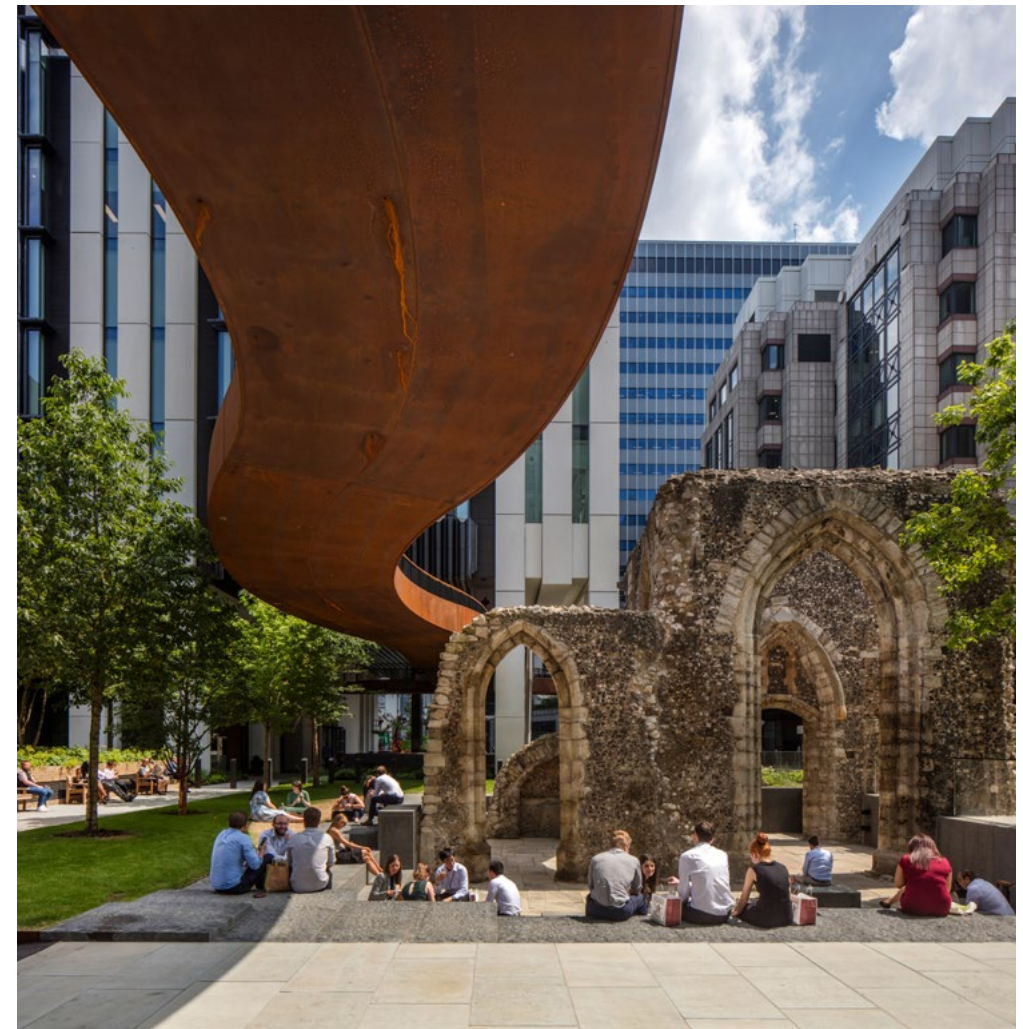


Initiated in 2015, the Wild West End project is an initiative by Westminster City Council in partnership with Great Estates and Arup as design lead to wild the borough and introduce more wildlife habitats and nature experiences in the city. It is a disaggregated project strengthened by the shared values of its foundational partners—Grosvenor, The Portman Estate, Great Portland Estates, Shaftesbury Capital, The Howard de Walden Estate, Church Commissioners and The Crown Estate—who collaborate with different organisations and landowners in unprecedented ways to create a new set of nature networks in the city.

On a dense site in the City of London, Brookfield Properties and Oxford Properties have delivered a sequence of multi-tiered public gardens designed by Make Architects and landscape architects Spacehub in 2018. Totalling 1.5 acres of public realm, London Wall Place is a sanctuary that brings an environmental and social dimension to this busy part of the City. New large canopy trees and native plants, including strawberry, lavender and ivy, have been chosen to thrive in the different microclimates of the site. The 1960s elevated highwalk have been reimagined as connecting bridges that links with a wider pedestrian network to enhance walkability in the Square Mile.

Many of London's most ecologically rich landscapes are along railway embankments. These are not designed landscapes, and because they are inaccessible and undisturbed, they have become abundant habitats for wildlife. These linear nature spaces can function as critical wildlife corridors in the city and blend with new landscapes to enhance and extend wildlife sites into established and proposed neighbourhoods.

In the Shöneberg district of Berlin, Natur Park Südgelände is an 18-hectare city park on a former railway yard, opened in 2000 as part of Expo 2000. When the Reichsbahn seized operations on the site in 1993, it was gradually and spontaneously reclaimed by dry grassland, tall herbaceous vegetation and native forests, proving that left alone nature can make a powerful comeback.



London Wall Place, by Make and Spacehub for London Wall Place Partnership, 2018
© Morley von Sternberg

Closer to home, in north London, a disused railway viaduct is about to be transformed into a green artery and wildlife corridor that links Camden and King's Cross. Camden Highline is a community initiative designed by landscape architects James Corner Field Operations and vPRP Architects, adopting a naturalistic approach using native grasses, perennials, trees and understory plants to enhance the local ecosystem, create habitats for wildlife and establish a resilient landscape inspired by the British countryside. It will be delivered in three phase, with the first section between Camden Gardens and Camden Road Station, aiming to be completed in 2027.

Barbican Podium: Life of the Woodland Edge

AtkinsRéalis in collaboration with Nigel Dunnett for the City of London Corporation, 2024

The iconic Barbican estate with its elevated podiums was designed as a place for people, completely free from vehicles. The landscape was originally high maintenance lawns and flower beds with trees and shrubs, requiring ongoing irrigation. Repair work to the estate's ageing podiums offered an opportunity to retrofit this

architectural landmark to meet the needs of contemporary society. The Barbican Podium: Life on the Woodland Edge is a climate resilient design that blends wildlife habitats with new amenity spaces—play, exercise and art trails—for residents and visitors alike.

The revitalised landscape is a radical new approach—a resilient urban ecology that can survive in a changing UK climate. Three different plant communities respond to the different microclimatic conditions across the site: steppe planting with grasses and perennials; shrub steppe with low-density

shrubs and multi-stemmed trees; and light woodland with widely spaced trees and a shrub understory. The plants are highly compatible with each other, creating synergies that mimic natural and wild ecosystems. Successive waves of plant life erupt in bloom and colour across the seasons, producing a varied and interesting landscape that supports a range of urban species.

Following completion of phase 2 (estimated for summer 2027), Barbican will see an increase in green space by over

70 per cent and a biodiversity net gain of over 240 per cent, which will reduce the urban heat island effect in the area. Innovative microclimate modelling helped inform the design of a surface water management system which will safeguard against more unpredictable weather conditions in the future.



Rewilding the city

by Sophie Thompson, Director and Head of Public Realm,
LDA Design



It's easy to imagine what rewilding the countryside might look like, but harder when it comes to cities. In 'Feral', George Monbiot lists the species that once roamed the UK, pointing out that when Trafalgar Square was excavated, the gravels were full of hippopotamus bones.

The idea pushes us. Do we want to see hippos before we head into the National Gallery? How about chasing after butterflies down Oxford Street? Where is the bold thinking in the UK, like Paris saying yes to swimming in the Seine?

Thamesmead in the 1960s was designed to give children from cramped homes in East London the best possible childhoods, providing adventure on their doorstep. Nature was central. The original designers for Thamesmead may not have described their approach as biophilic but it was, because they were enabling a wilder state for the human spirit. Biophilia is about health and wellbeing and happiness and reaches back to the origins of the human species and the instincts essential to our survival and success, such as refuge and discovery, risk and reward. Now Peabody, who are regenerating the town, are reaching back to a framework of living in the landscape.

Separating ourselves from nature is at the root of our current crises. The biodiversity crisis is a tale of decline over thousands of years, from hunting mammals to extinction to poisoning birdlife with pesticides. But estrangement is being entrenched by an urban environment that is vehicle dominated and highly controlled. In places, residents are even fighting councils to hold onto a few plants in pots tucked away on their estate walkways.



The Strand Aldwych by LDA Design for Westminster City Council, 2022 © Robin Forster for LDA Design

At the same time, we demand ever more of this urban environment. With new open spaces, people want to see planting maximised, and room made for play. They need be hard wearing and easy to maintain, integrate art and artefacts, generate income, support local business, and host events, activities and installations.

With such conflicting priorities, it can help to take a biophilic approach. When we recognise that humankind and nature are part of one single system, objectives can be balanced in a way that is mutually inclusive and beneficial.

What if every project was conceived from the start as purely green and blue space into which other required elements are then inserted, and also designed specifically to co-exist with nature? So, for example, play and adventure can be incorporated through a rope bridge walkway on a causeway with wild and natural planting either side.



Battersea Power Station public realm, by LDA Design for Battersea Power Station Development Company, 2022 © Neil Speakman for LDA Design

When it came to the restoration of Battersea Power Station, it could have just been about the building. But the story has become so much bigger because of the landscape. So, we find ourselves talking about play and community, about falcons nesting on a chimney, and 95 species of birds: about a moat of grasses, verbena and red-hot poker.

In an age of extinction, we need a bolder response than greening—we need wilding. We need to seize every opportunity to move back from the edge. Cleaning rivers like the Seine to make them fit for swimming means they start to teem with other life too. We need every space to work hard, not least the myriad wasted and leftover spaces all around us such as over-sized highway space, and mown grass with limited purpose. As storms and heat islands become more intense, we need nature-based solutions to slow and store the water.

This demands a new environmental aesthetic, allowing nature to colonise everywhere. We should champion weeds as the darling plants of our age, from the drought tolerant purple toadflax to the delicate and irresistibly delicious wild strawberry. Their vigour may not look pristine but it will look ever more beautiful as we retune our minds away from tidiness and to delight in ecological health.

Wilding gives us permission to think differently, and it requires more, not less, skill and knowledge. It sets ambitions high and protects nature from value engineering, by making it impossible to continue seeing nature primarily as a pretty backdrop.

Wilding is about way more than plants. The deepest purpose of wilding the city, and the biggest challenge and most important role of landscape architecture, is to heal the broken connection between people and nature.



Alfred Place Gardens by LDA Design for London Borough of Camden, 2022 © Neil Speakman for LDA Design

Culture on every corner

Art, craft and cultural activation in the public realm

Art and culture are often confined to museums and galleries, but the public realm offers endless opportunities for creative pursuits that engage, inspire and generate a sense of pride.

LFA HIGHLIGHT

Colour Palace pavilion for Dulwich Picture Gallery

Yinka Ilori and Pricegore, LFA2019

Yinka Ilori and Pricegore delivered a lively and celebratory fusion of African and European cultural traditions in the Colour Palace pavilion for Dulwich Picture Gallery as part of the London Festival of Architecture in 2019. Located between the diverse communities of Peckham, Brixton and Dulwich, the bright structure was conceived as a reflection of multicultural London.

A public arena for performances, talks and events, the intention was to attract new audiences and broaden the appeal of the gallery to a wider demographic. The pavilion was the second to be installed on the grounds of the gallery, succeeding the 2017 IF_DO pavilion. Both explored how the gallery's public realm could be transformed to be a more inclusive space for all local residents and audiences.

Following the dismantling of the pavilion, the materials were made into planters for the local schools and public realm, with the designers working closely with each nearby school—many of which can still be seen today.



Celebrating diversity

Art and craft can offer multi-sensory experiences that deepen people's connection with place. Artistic diversity in the public realm can break the monocultural uniformity and create places where everyone feels that they are allowed to exist. Granted a greater presence as a signifier of multi-cultural Britain, thoughtful, tactile and meaningful artwork can uplift us and generate feelings of pride.



Dalston House by Leandro Erlich for LFA2013
© London Festival of Architecture

surface were scaling the building, sitting in windows and hanging on by their fingernails. The Fourth Plinth project in Trafalgar Square has brought contemporary aesthetics to a traditional ensemble of statues, and The Line public art project in east London guides people from Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park to the O2 through a series of landmark art installations.

Art has been an integral part of the public domain in the UK for decades. Over the past 20 years, the expression of public art has taken new forms—it provokes and compels in equal measures, asks us to interact and step out of our comfort zone. Dalston House by Argentinian artist Leandro Erlich for LFA2013 positioned a house facade flat on the ground under a 45-degree angled mirror. The reflection created an illusion that people who moved across the horizontal



Catching Colour; a site-specific, outdoor installation by Rana Begum was created for Botanic Square, London City Island and curated by The Line, 2018. © Angus Mills

Brookfield Properties have a public arts programme, working with artists from across the world and representing them in public spaces. They have partnered with the Crafts Council to curate smaller artwork that integrate well in the public realm. The ideology is to keep rotating the pieces and continuously deliver new experiences so that there is always something new to talk about. For the Amazon headquarters in Shoreditch by Foster + Partners they installed a blow-up piece that people can sit on and interact with.

“Art can elicit diverse opinions, sparking conversation and interaction. Public space is fundamentally about fostering connections.”

Caitlin Warfield, Vice President, Marketing and Communications, Brookfield Properties





The Granary, part of the Sculpture in the City programme, by Jesse Pollock, 2021 © Nick Turpin

Sculpture in the City (SITC) was created in 2010 as an annual exhibition that uses the City of London's public realm as a rotating gallery space, creating a dialogue between art and architecture. SITC has grown strong roots in the local community, for example through educational programmes with local school children, art and architecture workshops, and events and activities with local **Business Improvement Districts** (BIDs) and community groups. The temporary and experimental nature of the exhibition has enabled SITC and its partners to redefine what constitutes public art, allowing it to evolve beyond traditional forms.

The artist, designer and author Adam Nathaniel Furman is part of the London Fabulous movement, which was coined in a happenstance moment of serendipity and refers to a collective of London practitioners from a diverse background—Yinka Ilori, Camille Walala and Morag Myerscough—with a shared interest in the expression of diverse cultures, ornament and colourful aesthetics in the public realm. In 2019, Adam created the joyful and interactive public realm installation Gateways for Granary Square in King's Cross, consisting of four ceramic gateways through which

visitors could saunter theatrically. The installation celebrated ancient tile making and individual expression, allowing each and every one to take centre stage.

Changing perceptions

London's public realm has been further invigorated through the integration of lights and technology, creating inspiring urban experiences. The iconic Piccadilly Lights, a symbol of the city since 1908, underwent a major transformation in 2017 when the original patchwork of screens was replaced with a single 4K LED screen, enhancing its visual impact and interactivity. Similarly, the Outernet in Tottenham Court Road, launched in 2021, features the world's largest high-resolution wrap-around screens, creating immersive environments for public art, advertising, and cultural events. These projects showcase London's commitment to blending technology with public spaces to enhance urban life and cultural engagement. And the BBC Earth Experience, introduced in 2018, uses cutting-edge technology to bring the wonders of the natural world to the heart of the city, offering visitors a captivating journey through Earth's ecosystems and wildlife habitats, further enriching the urban landscape with educational and immersive experiences.

Cultural **activation** can take many forms. When the London Borough of Waltham Forest won the London Borough of Culture bid in 2019¹⁶, they used the opportunity to make a lasting impact through creative and artistic events. A flexible programme allowed the council to test and respond to feedback, fine tuning their approach throughout the year. Big hero events were matched by a strong network of grassroots organisations that put on hyper-local events and invited people to participate.

The public realm became part of the local cultural infrastructure and events took place on every corner in every neighbourhood. Surprise performances were organised in unexpected places: Red light busking in shop windows, Art Night on the High Street, children singing opera in the trees of Epping Forest. During COVID-19, digital events and doorstep carnivals enabled residents



Tower Hamlets Town Hall public realm, by Allford Hall Monaghan Morris, KLA—Kinnear Landscape Architects and Levitt Bernstein for the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, 2023 © Tim Soar

to continue enjoying art and culture from the safety of their homes. Following the London Borough of Culture year, Waltham Forest have focused on harvesting the skills that were developed and channel these into new job opportunities and work experiences to support culture as a career for local people.

“65 per cent of local residents agree that culture should remain a priority for the borough, and given that it is the sixth most deprived borough there are lots of things that councils could and should spend money on. However our experience has shown that culture can do so much—it is not the icing on the cake, it is the cake.”

Lorna Lee, Assistant Director of Culture and Destinations for Waltham Forest

Since 2021, Waltham Forest has been reimagining its town hall and surroundings with extensive green public spaces and event areas, promoting civic pride and community engagement, designed by Hawkins\Brown. Significant enhancements to the civic spaces outside town halls have been seen across London, transforming them into vibrant community hubs. These developments provide welcoming environments for public gatherings, cultural events, and daily activities, fostering stronger community connections. For instance, the area around Barking Central, designed by Allford Hall Monaghan Morris and Grant Associates was revitalised in 2007 with public art and landscaped areas, creating a dynamic civic space. Hackney Central has similarly benefitted from recent improvements that include pedestrian-friendly zones and new public art with Hackney’s Windrush initiative, commissioned by Create London in collaboration with Hackney Council. Hammersmith’s town hall area is undergoing redevelopment, and Tower Hamlets transformed the space outside its town hall making it a lively public space. Following Mayor Sadiq Khan’s decision to move the administrative headquarters in 2022 to The Crystal in the Royal Docks, the new City Hall introduced open spaces that host community events and activities, reinforcing ‘London’s Living Room’ role as a central civic space for the capital.



Wembley Park Cultural Placemaking Strategy

Flanagan Lawrence, Gillespies, LDA design, Futurecity for Quintain, 2027

At Wembley Park, Quintain has an ambition to leave a rich legacy of art and culture alongside sports and music. A partnership with the theatre company Punchdrunk Enrichment has led to a three-year residency on site, where they operate the first ever co-created immersive arts space that supports local artist development, offer experiences for families and training opportunities for young people, including the literacy project 'The Lost Lending Library'.

As part of a community engagement initiative, Quintain collaborated with the London School of Economics, the Greater London Authority and the London Borough of Brent on the project 'Seen and Heard', which was hearing out 16- to 24-year-olds who are often excluded from public spaces. That morphed into the project Apprentices in City Making, which worked with young people in Brent during the summer 2019 to articulate a charter and guidelines for young people's spaces and places. This developed into the Samovar Place and White Horse Square projects, the latter in collaboration with by DSDHA, which celebrated the theatre of the street.

A more comprehensive Cultural Placemaking Strategy was developed to establish a confident new Creative District around the stadium to shift perceptions and nurture a sense of place in this rapidly changing area. Futurecity cultural placemaking consultants worked with developer Quintain to transform Olympic Way into a cultural spine, drawing upon the area's unique music, sport and cultural heritage to inform the cultural programming, commissions and partnerships. Part of the plans has seen the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra move its headquarters to Wembley Park, establishing a single hub that brings together education, community outreach, performance, digital projects and administration.

Viewpoint

Art to activate public spaces

by Mark Williams, Deputy Chief Executive, Heart of London Business Alliance (HOLBA)



Heart of London Business Alliance (HOLBA) represents 600 businesses and property owners in London's West End. We understand that championing cultural, artistic, and economic contributions is important not only to our members, but also to those who live, work, and visit the areas we represent.

Central to our mission of creating a world-class destination is how we activate public spaces. We continually strive to improve our approach, ensuring that the right voices are heard and that our projects reflect the needs of the area. We achieve this



Pop Geometry by Zarah Hussain features across the West End as part of Art of London 'Brighter Future', 2022 © Courtesy of HOLBA

through extensive engagement with businesses, stakeholders, and communities, aligning diverse interests under a unified vision. One example of our efforts is our focus on cultivating cultural partnerships.



Augmented Reality Art Gallery, as part of Art of London, 2021
© Courtesy of HOLBA / PinPep

In 2021, we launched Art of London, a consumer initiative aimed at bringing the Heart of London's leading cultural strategy to life. By bringing together artists, creatives, businesses, and some of the UK's biggest cultural

institutions, Art of London gathers the wonderful cultural activity across the West End and showcases a creative district brimming with inspiration at the epicentre of the global city of culture. The initiative celebrates art in all its forms, from what is created behind the legendary doors of our area's institutions to the outdoor spaces, creating an exceptional 'Gallery without Walls'.

Art of London became a primary driver post-pandemic, attracting new audiences back into the West End while highlighting our fantastic cultural institutions and brightening up our city.

As the UK emerged from lockdown, our first activation, the 'Augmented Reality Gallery', brought together the Royal Academy, National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, and Sky Arts to transform the West End into a giant open-air gallery trail, utilising groundbreaking technology to encourage visitors back into the area and enjoy art outdoors at a time when entering public buildings had to be cautiously managed.



Art After Dark, The Cornucopia by MTArt Artist Claire Luxton, October 2023 © Tom Webb



Piccadilly Art Takeover, in partnership with The Royal Academy, as part of Art of London, 2021
© Joe Pepler / PinPep

Since then, we have delivered three summer seasons of public art. In our first season, we collaborated with established artists from the Royal Academy who painted vibrant street crossings, provided colourful flags, and transformed Piccadilly Circus into a giant open-air cinema. Moving on to our second season, we challenged emerging artists to respond to their idea of a 'Brighter Future', selecting three artists to display their works across the West End.

Last year, we launched our 'Art After Dark' event, combining activities both within our world-class galleries, including 'Gallery Hop tours,' and with public art activations. The initiative showcased some of the incredible cultural experiences that the Heart of London has to offer around the clock.

However, the power of Art of London lies in its partnerships. Over the past three years, we have worked to bring together arts institutions, artists, pop stars, brands, charities, and businesses to create a continuous program of activity that presents and complements the world-class area we represent.

Let it ripple

Temporary and small-scale projects with the power to make a real difference

Once considered a nice add-on, meanwhile projects have become a serious tool to test and try concepts before making a permanent commitment. Light but powerful, they have the capacity to engage the public, change perceptions and influence long-term thinking.

LFA HIGHLIGHT

Let's Meet on the Edge

Edgy Collective, LFA2023

For the LFA2023, the London Borough of Barnet worked with the local group Edgy Collective to deliver the project Let's Meet on the Edge. A section of Edgware town centre from the station to the high street was transformed through a series of nature-based installations made from reclaimed materials: a totem for invertebrates installed outside Edgware Station; a bakery path portal welcoming visitors with greenery and poetry; and a garden square for congregation established on a suspended area of car parking.

The meanwhile approach allowed the project team to be more playful, dynamic and edgy than a permanent design would have allowed, which resulted in something new and unique for Edgware.

Whilst temporary, the playful response of Let's Meet on the Edge has fed into the long-term plans for the area, engaging all key stakeholders, including local residents and landowners, and explored ideas around the importance of culture in outer London boroughs.



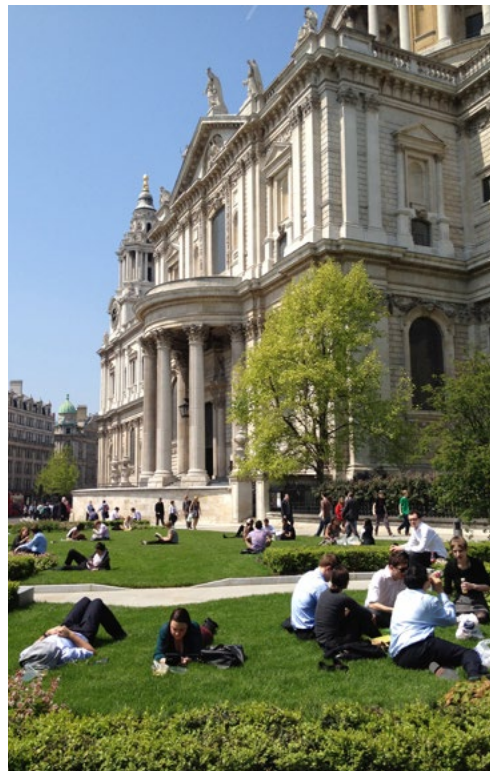
A testbed for new ideas

Small and meanwhile projects allow for experimentation and innovation in the public realm. Because they are not final they are less risky and can be more radical—if it doesn't work out it is easy to revert back or try something else. Therein lies their power. Whilst often small, the impacts of these types of projects can ripple across wider catchments, change perceptions of place, and influence the way we think about and use our public realm.

Temporary projects can circumnavigate lengthy planning approval processes and deliver change quickly. They carry the potential to test new ideas and observe how people respond. This iterative design process borrows from product design, where prototypes are tested by consumers and evolved with feedback. Translated to public realm design, this approach offers an interactive form of user engagement which, if successful, builds a case for a



King's Cross Pond Club by Ooze and B|D Landscape Architects for Related Argent and Carillion Construction services, 2015–2016 © John Sturrock



St Paul's Churchyard before and after, 2011. By Townshend Landscape Architects for the city of London Corporation © Courtesy of the City of London Corporation

permanent transformation. A case in point, few would have approved of removing traffic from Times Square in New York City in 2009, but because it was initially done as a temporary experiment with a 71 per cent uplift in shop revenues and increased perceptions of safety, people could buy into it and be more supportive of a permanent change.

At King's Cross, the early meanwhile interventions have left a lasting legacy. An industrial wasteland was transformed with simple, joyful, and strategic interventions, teeming with new life and cementing its status as a destination long before the first phases of development were completed. Granary Square, designed by Townshend Landscape Architects, was delivered in 2012 and has since played host to a myriad of art and culture events. The 2015–2016 King's Cross Pond Club by Ooze and B|D Landscape Architects for Related Argent and Carillion construction Services was the first ever natural public swimming pool in the UK, purified through natural wetlands and submerged plants. Many of the meanwhile projects were developed in collaboration with local



businesses, organisations and community groups, and some demonstrated the placemaking power of more unruly and unconventional temporary catalysts. From its early days, King's Cross was embraced by Londoners as a place apart, which generated widespread appeal and elevated the capitalisation value of the development that followed.

Temporary projects oftentimes invite us to parts of the city that have been out of bounds, or to places we didn't know existed. They prove that London's small and leftover spaces carry the potential to create unique experiences, revealing a different side of the city that was previously unknown.

“Some of the most exciting cultural activation projects that I've seen over the last 20 years have been the unexpected projects that allow you to experience a place in a completely different way—a lido or an orchard where you don't expect it or a cultural experience that you wouldn't normally see in a city. It's the encounters that subvert your everyday experience of place that work really well. That's where a lot of the progressive ideas lie.”

Synthia Griffin, Arts & Culture Manager,
Strategy & Innovation, London Borough of Barnet

From meanwhile to phase zero

Once thought of as nice add-on, there is now a genuine understanding of the value of temporary projects to good placemaking, community engagement and activation. Meanwhile use has become a serious tool and an essential component in many masterplans, offering opportunities to trial new uses before investing in costly and permanent projects. They also build community and belonging; when something new is constructed, it can be difficult to foster an immediate sense of belonging. Carl Turner talks about the pull effect of meanwhile and how it can create a draw, rather than pushing people away.



Read and play event in Times Square, New York, by Street Lab and hosted by NYC DOT, 2022 © Street Lab

Martyn Evans, Creative Director at Landsec U+I, has stopped using the term 'meanwhile' and calls it 'phase zero', which underlines its importance in the development process. "The temporary components are seen as part of a single process, from start to finished development, not as something you do while you think about the real thing", says Martyn. Mayfield, Landsec U+I's 24-acre mixed-use development in central Manchester, contains a 10,000-capacity live music venue that have drawn nearly 3 million visitors since its opening in 2019. The venue will be morphed into the permanent development, but in a different guise. "But at no point will we say 'thanks for coming and dancing, that's over now, here are some office buildings'. We want that joyfulness and community spirit and engagement with people to continue to be at the core of our scheme", says Martyn.

Meanwhile projects don't necessary mean short-term interventions, and many of the big masterplan projects in London

have adopted meanwhile uses as a way to invite the public before completion of the first phases. In Brent Cross, Related Argent and the London Borough of Barnet worked in partnership to deliver an interim park in 2020, Brent Cross Exploratory, until the permanent ones are completed. The park, designed by East, will be opened for several years, providing a temporary open space and allowing the local community to use and activate the place. For Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, meanwhile projects have been utilised for years to animate and activate different parts of the park before the construction of phased residential development starts, and are also part of the legacy strategy of the park following the London 2012 Olympic Games.¹⁷

Turner Works have invented the ‘micro plan’ concept which is a strategy for layering small projects, some of them meanwhile, into long-term masterplans. This entails looking beyond the red line boundary and allowing the surrounding areas to influence the micro plan, which in turn ripples through the masterplan and across the wider neighbourhood, adding specificity to places of change. This type of planning requires the right partners who understand the potential of meanwhile and micro planning, and the process has to be embedded from the beginning—as years into a project the potential for meanwhile might be lost. Turner Works are producing a micro plan for the Winchester Town Centre masterplan in partnership with developers igloo and Kojima, who are committed to sustainable design and meanwhile as a form of engagement. Instead of undertaking a separate engagement process, the micro plan becomes a method for people to get involved, not just by commenting, but by taking part in building a community for the future that will plug into the long-term masterplan. It’s driven by meanwhile thinking, but it’s a bottom-up process.

A tool for local economy

Meanwhile projects can also offer a stepping stone for the local economy. An alternative to the high street, it is an easy-in/easy-out option that allow local businesses to experiment. Hackney Bridge,

a meanwhile incubator space by Turner Works in one of the future London 2012 Olympic Games legacy neighbourhoods, builds on the idea of a high street folded into a campus. The place’s success relies on its high accessibility and a mix of education, culture and entertainment. Its temporary nature enables it to pivot in response to unforeseen changes, an invaluable asset in our uncertain times.

Temporary bars and restaurants have reinvigorated the London night-life and diversified the local offering in neighbourhoods of change. BOXPARK has inserted food and events destinations on empty and derelict sites across London since 2011, and in more recent year expanded to Liverpool, Birmingham and Bristol. In south London, on a four-meter-wide sliver of land along a construction hoarding at Elephant Park, the 2021 Sayer Street scheme by Jan Kattein for Lendlease is one temporary half of a high street that delivers spaces for people to meet over culture, food and drink. The project responds to the challenge of how to revitalise town centres and high streets in an era of online shopping and economic uncertainty, offering affordable spaces for entrepreneurs and a point of gravity for the local night-life.



Sayer street at Elephant Park, by Jan Kattein Architects for Lendlease and B|D Landscape Architects, 2023 © Jack Hobhouse



Summer and Winter installations at Citypoint
Space Objekt, Hybycozo for Brookfield Properties, 2021–2023

Building long-term cultural partnerships and working with emerging and contemporary artists, the Summer and Winter artworks activate indoor and outdoor spaces for a wide range of visitors, with an artistic space for play.

Through initiatives such as food markets, wellbeing programming, and providing practical amenities like shade, the project facilitates deeper engagement with plaza spaces. The project's emphasis on collaborating with local councils, artists, structural engineers, and suppliers demonstrates a commitment to navigating challenges collaboratively and pushing boundaries in terms of space, usage, and playfulness.

Viewpoint

The role of meanwhile projects in placemaking

by Ruchi Chakravarty, Masterplanning, Urban Design and Placemaking consultant



As we look to the future of placemaking in London, meanwhile projects offer valuable insights and lessons learned. In an era marked by rapid urbanisation, climate change, and social inequality, the need for agile, adaptable approaches to urban development has never been greater. Meanwhile projects provide a blueprint for how temporary interventions can pave the way for long-term transformation, harnessing the power of collaboration, innovation, and community engagement.

With multi-year project timelines within a fast-evolving context, projects often face challenges to their relevance from conceptualising through development to realisation. The considered use of a meanwhile strategy through project life cycles can provide significant 'check points' and a window into a transformed future to the community. When combined with a cohesive engagement and co-creative process across the project's lifecycle these interventions foster a sense of ownership and pride within local communities, whilst benefitting from feedback loops which positively influence and add richness to the permanent project. Through collaboration and co-creation, stakeholders become actively involved in the shaping of their built environment and the trust forged through these grassroots initiatives serves as a solid foundation for impactful engagement and inclusive decision-making processes.

The Strand Aldwych scheme, by LDA Design for Westminster City Council, was developed and co-created over a 5-year period with over 70 stakeholders, in partnership with local stakeholders

including the Northbank BID, King's College London, London School of Economics, Somerset House Trust, St Mary Le Strand and The Courtauld Institute.



The Strand Aldwych © Mickey LF Lee

The project benefitted from meanwhile activation as a skatepark with alfresco dining in 2021 and was delivered in 2022 as a part-meanwhile project, with the public space designed as a 'mock up' of the permanent scheme. This has made way for experimentation in stakeholder led management structures, curation and maintenance whilst managing changes triggered by major schemes, such as the work initiated by the Heritage Lottery Fund for St Mary Le Strand.

The approach built upon lessons in the development and delivery of Times Square in New York over 6 years, going from a temporary closure in 2009 and building evidence to convince a sceptical stakeholder base, to a permanent and successful scheme delivered in 2015.

Beyond their immediate impact on neighbourhoods, meanwhile projects serve as catalysts for innovation, pushing the boundaries of traditional urban design and planning. Freed from the constraints of permanence, these projects provide a platform for experimentation and exploration of alternative uses for urban space. From pop-up parks to temporary art installations,

meanwhile projects spark creativity and challenge conventional notions of placemaking. The LFA intervention in 2019 on the Harrow Road Canalside commissioned by Westminster City Council is one such example where a conversation was triggered with the community, stakeholders and Canals & Rivers Trust around the future of the canalside. The scheme explored potential changes to the towpath combined with a community focused events programme, learnings from which are being incorporated in the development for the long-term canal strategy for the area.

The ripple effects of meanwhile projects extend far beyond their physical footprint, influencing design thinking at a city-wide level. The principles and lessons learned from meanwhile projects permeate urban policy, leading to more inclusive, sustainable, and people-centric approaches to city-building. The Barcelona Superblocks are a prime example of how this is helping the city to achieve its net zero targets. The combination of top-down strategy



Harrow Road Canalside, LFA2019 © Westminster City Council

around traffic movement with bottom-up, citizen-led initiatives such as the Bici Bus (bike bus) and the creation of people friendly urban spaces within blocks through tactical urbanism has resulted in a symbiosis of design, strategy and speedy delivery through an agile approach over time, providing a benchmark for dense urban centres around considered change towards strategic objectives, in this case, net zero targets.

In conclusion, meanwhile projects are not mere temporary installations; used effectively they have the potential to be agents of change, with the potential to drive forward the evolution of the built environment. By activating spaces, building trust, and fostering innovation, successful meanwhile projects can leave an indelible mark on the city, shaping design thinking and placemaking practices for years to come.



The Strand Aldwych, delivered in 2022 © Mickey LF Lee

Extended shelf life

Embracing circularity and taking a stewardship approach to placemaking

Collective care and the sharing of assets can extend the shelf-life of our public spaces. Designing for the long-term or with an afterlife in mind allows objects and places to form part of a continuum and a process of evolution in the city, reducing the environmental impact.

LFA HIGHLIGHT

New Growth on Exhibition Road

The Algae Meadow by Seyi Adekun and Wayward for the V&A, Home Away from Hive by Mizzi Studio for the Science Museum, Windflower by Urban Radicals with Adam Harris for the Goethe Institute and The Wildian by Fran Kirk and Patrick McEvoy, LFA2021

Delivered to support the post-pandemic recovery of the Exhibition Road arts and science district, the 2021 installation comprises a series of green interventions by a group of emerging designers.

Building on the Festival's 2008 intervention, which consulted the public on plans to convert the street into a pedestrian priority 'high street for culture', the successful collaboration transformed the road into a safer and greener place for people, art and science and formed the foundations for the now annual 'Great Exhibition Road Festival'.



A circular approach

Every design, whether temporary or permanent, has an expiration date and at the end of its life, it might be stripped back, retrofitted or upgraded, or taken down. As such we should consider all built objects as part of a continuum and a process of evolution in the city and they should be designed with an afterlife in mind. With new and emerging technologies, there is an opportunity to produce materials and components that can be returned and reused, repaired or remanufactured, granting them an extended shelf-life.

The Mayor of London has set ambitious targets for the capital to achieve net zero by 2030, which hinges on a shift towards collaborative consumption—the sharing of assets—to promote reuse, reduce waste and prevent environmental degradation. The NLA report *Circular London: Building a Renewable City*¹⁸ explores the strategies, initiatives and projects that contribute towards a circular city.

The 21-metre permanent public artwork that wraps Brent Cross Substation, delivered in 2023 for Related Argent, was constructed from reused oil pipelines. Architects IF_DO and artist Lakwena worked in close collaboration with Arup to push a circular agenda, which required new ways of designing and sourcing materials. Thomas Bryans, Director at IF_DO, says that: “the client had to buy the steel early, before a contractor was appointed, because later on those particular components might not be available and the structure would have to be redesigned. It was an interesting case study that proved what needs to change in the construction industry to enable this type of project.”

Circular thinking is of particular importance in short lived and meanwhile projects. Buildings that are designed with minimal foundations and wet trades are easy to dismantle so that the entire structure can be relocated or its component parts reused or recycled at the end of its life. Most of the LFA projects are designed with an afterlife in mind, where components can be recycled or furniture reused elsewhere. For instance, the ‘Colour Palace’



Brent Cross Town Substation by IF_DO and Lakwena for Related Argent, 2023 © John Sturrock

by Pricegore with Yinka Ilori saw 100 per cent of its cladding and structural timber recycled to make modular planters and involved local schoolchildren to take an role in this process. Or the ‘A Cautionary Bench/Mark’ by Andre Kong Studio, part of the third edition of the Pews and Perches competition for LFA2022 in partnership with the Royal Docks, which used recycled materials for its production. The materials were then reused once again for the creation of an 2023 intervention ‘Round The Neighbourhood’, a project which invited local students to learn more about the ideas behind and skills required for circular design.

The City of London are employing circular strategies in a temporary installation, using reclaimed stone from the Joseph Bazalgette’s 19th century Thames River wall that had to be removed during the Tideway Tunnel works. The 58 stones have been repurposed as benches in seven locations across the city, from the Millennium Bridge to St Paul’s Cathedral and all the way to Smithfield Market. Information boards explain where the stones come from, which opens up a conversation about circularity with a wider audience, stimulate discussion about reuse, material lifespan and cultural heritage, at a time when we can make a significant contribution to a more sustainable built environment.. At the end of their lives as benches, the stones will be integrated into a permanent project.

Long-term stewardship

Quality materials in the public realm have an extended lifespan and reduce the need for replacements, and a consistent palette across the public realm allow for materials from one location to be reused in another. This is the approach adopted by Quintain at Wembley Park, where the public realm needs to be hardwearing and clean up well after big events. A service charge regime for all freeholders underpins the management of the estate and on match days, the stadium pays an extra charge which is essential or the environment would degrade over time.

“There is an incredible attention to detail in the public realm, not just the streetscape but the furniture, the lighting and how all the components are managed day-to-day. There is a whole estate management plan that goes with that and that is fundamental to our success.”

James Saunders, Chief Executive Officer, Quintain

This approach hinges on a long-term stewardship approach, echoing the Great Estates¹⁹ models known for their long-term strategy and maintenance of public spaces.

Like the Great Estate, some big developers invest into places and hold them over a long period to ensure their long term success for key shareholders. This is achieved by creating places which are desirable in the short term alongside longer term plans for maintaining the space, ingraining this into the business model and long-term viability of the project. Martyn Evans explains that “there’s a commercial imperative which is about understanding that there is value in good places. It is good for everybody—owners, investors, the people who use it and live and work and breathe it every day. Part of that is to provide a budget for maintenance decades into the future through a service charge, covenant or some other investment fund that guarantees quality of place over time”.



Wembley Park public realm, 2022 © Chris Winter

Community involvement and care is another critical component that contributes to the success of a place. If people have been part of shaping the design they are more likely to feel invested, which can inspire local people to become enthusiastic custodians of place, helping to maintain and sustain it in the long-term. Stephen Richards, Partner at Gillespies, says that the traditional park keeper is somebody that can provide an impetus, get people involved and keep the life of a space going: “Events and activities give places a rhythm and I think cities operate on that.”

In the London Borough of Hackney, the charity Tree Musketeers propagate, plant and care for trees on private and public green spaces. Run entirely by volunteers, they deliver essential tree maintenance, grow free seasonal fruits for local people, and engage communities in nature-focused events and workshops. Further south, in Vauxhall, a residents’ association has created a verdant garden on a World War II bomb site; lovingly cared for by volunteers. Bonnington Square Gardens has become a popular focal point in the neighbourhood and a welcome escape from the madding crowds.



Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

LDA Design with Hargreaves, for Olympic Delivery Authority and London Legacy Development Corporation, 2012

Formed in April 2012 for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the London Legacy Development Corporation is responsible for the Olympic Games legacy, developing a long-term strategy, and managing and maintaining the Park and its impact on the surrounding area after the London 2012 Games.

Shared agenda

Working in partnership towards common goals

With shared agendas and responsibilities, we have the capacity to look beyond red lines and administrative boundaries to take a holistic approach to public space design, balancing strategic thinking with hyper-local solutions.

LFA HIGHLIGHT

You Are Here

Charles Holland Architects for Team London Bridge BID, LFA2020

'You are Here' (alternatively known as the Tooley Street Beacon) is a wayfinding installation outside London Bridge Station designed by Charles Holland Architects. The beacon acts as a meeting point, a resting place, a source of historical information and a map to help people navigate the area. The installation was a symbol of renewal and recovery as London Bridge businesses reopened following lockdown.

LFA and the Team London Bridge BID, a partnership with more than 350 members, came together to deliver the project.

The project has become a key asset of the area, and remains a fun meeting place to this day.



The role of policy

Over the course of the past 20 years the role of the London Mayor has gained in importance as a unifying force behind large scale projects in the capital. From Ken Livingstone's 100 Squares to Boris Johnson's Great Outdoors to Sadiq Khan's Healthy Streets and Rewild London Fund, the political baton has passed between visionaries with clear ambitions for the capital's public realm, ensuring that placemaking projects are underpinned by a shared agenda.

With the power to span disciplines and administrative boundaries, city-wide policy drives the bigger systems thinking around topics including equality and democracy, sustainability and circularity, climate change mitigation and greening to create a healthier and more liveable city in the round. It is therefore the responsibility of policy to advocate for the type of city we want to live in, and facilitate that to happen. Coupled with policy should be a hyper-local sensibility that acknowledges the needs on a more granular level, blending strategic thinking with testing on the ground.

“ I don't know how it would be possible to implement the rate of change that we want to see unless there are policies in place that have been developed through consultation and by a democratically elected authority such as The Mayor's Transport Strategy 2018. At the centre of this strategy is the main objective for 80 per cent of all trips in London to be made on foot, by cycle or using public transport by 2041. This is a major task and achieving it won't be easy.”

Roy McGowan, Managing Director,
Momentum Transport Consultancy

For the Barbican Podium, the City of London's 2020 Climate Resilient Strategy was a critical piece of policy to deliver the amount of greening proposed in the nature focused designs. Neil Manthorpe, Associate Director at AtkinsRéalis, says that it allowed for a significant shift in the approach that pushed for integrated

nature-based solutions, from the sustainable urban drainage systems to the wildlife friendly planting.

Partnership working

For individual projects, change relies on highly charismatic teams and individuals with a clearly articulated vision. It is crucial that this is established at the outset and monitored over the course of a project, as different partners can often arrive or push differing objectives through out the process.

Mayfield is a 50/50 public/private joint venture partnership between London & Continental Railways, Manchester City Council,



Mayfield Park in Manchester, by Studio Egret West for Landsec U+I, delivered in 2019
© Richard Bloom



The Low Line is an ongoing urban regeneration initiative bringing to life the Victorian railway viaduct, and connecting diverse neighbourhoods through Bankside, London Bridge, and Bermondsey. It is a shared-vision project involving the project partners, residential community, and businesses. Project partnership: Better Bankside, Blue Bermondsey BID, Southwark Council, Team London Bridge, The Arch Company © Better Bankside

Transport for Greater Manchester and developer Landsec U+I. Together, they have created a vision for a vibrant neighbourhood centred on a new seven-acre public park. Martyn Evans explains that all partners bring their own needs and objectives to the table and they are satisfied through one single, shared vision: “most importantly, it is about everybody in that partnership. You have to work out what that shared vision is and unless you can stand in each other’s shoes and understand each other’s needs, you can’t do that. That hinges on relationship building and communication. You can’t spend enough time nurturing those relationships.”

Synergies between the public and private sectors are paramount for successful community building and to make meaningful and lasting places that will live on for generations. This is easier to accomplish for large masterplans where one developer or joint venture is in charge than on complex sites with many landowners and stakeholders in which case leadership is required from city planners and private developers. If the public and private sectors can be linked up in terms of funding, effort, skills and will, there are huge benefits to be made.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) provide an opportunity to bring public and private parties together. BIDs are generally set up to create cleaner, greener and safer environments but they have the capacity to think bigger and deliver more comprehensive change. Synthia Griffin, Arts & Culture Manager, Strategy & Innovation at London Borough of Barnet, was involved in the local BID during her time as Curator of Regeneration & Community Partnerships at Tate Modern. She recalls the remit of the BID to connect businesses that had a vested stake in the local area, large and small, with the local authority to deliver a bigger picture project through a collaborative approach. “It galvanised the thinking around the cultural institutions and the relationship between the local Bankside neighbourhood, the Elephant and Castle regeneration scheme and other local areas. I can’t think of another model that enables that. It can be very challenging to align ambitions in a central London context where there are different local authority boundaries and lots of different motivations.”



Elephant Park
Gillespies for Lendlease,
2021

The Park sits in the regeneration scheme of Elephant and Castle. It's a sustainable community space featuring expansive lawns, colourful rain gardens, a water playscape, Elephant Springs, and walkways.

The project underscores the importance of local authorities and developers joining forces to ensure the delivery of substantial outdoor space, from stage 1. Community engagement was also paramount, involving local stakeholders and an established Park Advisory Group comprised of community and council representatives.

Viewpoint

Powerful partnerships: the key to London's success

by Ruth Duston OBE, CEO and Founder, Primera



What does a university, an art gallery, a council and a church have in common? As it turns out, a whole lot more than first meets the eye. This is what came out of the work that was spearheaded by the Northbank Business Improvement District (BID) and kicked off with the launch of its public realm vision and

strategy in 2015. And years later, it's resulted in one of the most ambitious public realm projects seen in London in recent years.

Strand/Aldwych is only one of many tangible examples of the power of partnership. At a time of increased division (in politics, online, in the world), there isn't anything more powerful than making the decision to come together to effect positive change. Beyond the initial impulse for change, in the case of Strand/Aldwych a wholesale redesign of one of the most polluted and dangerous corners of central London, the project's key partners—King's College London, Somerset House, St Mary Le Strand, the Society of London Theatre, The Courtauld, and of course Westminster City Council and the Northbank BID, all supported by many others—carry on working together to manage and activate this new public space for Londoners and visitors to enjoy.

And this successful example isn't an isolated one. Partnerships are coming to life all over our capital. Of course, as an organisation specialising in improvement districts, it is no surprise to see Primera and the BIDs in our portfolio championing the coming together of the public and private sectors to deliver meaningful change. After all, partnerships are the very essence of BIDs, and we have seen first-hand how much of an impact they can have.

Over in the City of London, where Primera operates five BIDs—Aldgate Connect, Cheapside Business Alliance, Culture Mile BID, Eastern City BID, Fleet Street Quarter and for the 20th edition of the London Festival of Architecture, an architecture trail was created to celebrate the City's heritage. Working closely with the City of London and with Urban Radicals—the winners of the design competition hosted by four of the BIDs and LFA—the project created four interventions which provided unique moments of public realm activation and gave visitors a new perspective on the Square Mile.

On a city-wide scale too, partnerships can be the key to unlock success. Primera is a proud member of Opportunity London, an initiative launched by the Mayor of London, London Councils and the City of London Corporation, and operated by NLA and London & Partners, and which brings together some of the key stakeholders in London's growth. By convening all these organisations with a stake in London's success, we can showcase the incredible opportunities on offer in our capital city to investors from all over the world, as exemplified during this year's iteration of MIPIM.

The case for partnership working is an easy one to make. Bringing together ambitions, skills and resources to work jointly towards a shared goal is the one sure way to deliver more, and bigger, things. After a turbulent few years, it is our duty to our city, and to Londoners, to come together for the greater good.

Looking forward

The past 20 years have been shaped by new realities and unprecedented events, contributing to a renewed appreciation for our public spaces. In 2004, we would have been hard pressed to foresee the events that would unfold, and how profoundly they would affect our lives and our cities.

With this historical hindsight, our gaze ahead is blurred by the knowledge that what we take for granted could change on a dime. However, the tendencies that we observe in the present day are indicators of the priorities for the future.

With a greater freedom of individual expression, an increased emphasis on tolerance, democracy and equality in the public realm can contribute towards creating spaces where everyone is free and safe to be themselves. A spotlight on groups that are consistently overlooked—children, teenagers, elderly and vulnerable people—can generate more diverse and nuanced solutions that break away from the established norms, embracing the complexity of London's population.

A new remit to experiment has injected more happiness and spontaneity into the urban realm, at least temporarily as part of bigger shifts, and the city would benefit from taking joy more seriously in its pursuit of quality spaces for its citizens. As the capital densifies, much of the looseness and informality are designed out in favour of commercial development, which could be compensated for by a greater allowance for citizen intervention and creativity in the public realm; co-creation with community and 'hackable spaces' as ways to grant people a greater agency in the city.

Innovative approaches to participation and co-creation can help ground spaces and projects in community needs and lived experiences. And if we are willing to relinquish a degree of control, grassroot initiatives and self-organisation can inspire and activate whilst instilling a greater sense of belonging. Meanwhile uses can offer new methods of interactive engagement to test the needs on the ground. Having once been a nice add-on, meanwhile projects

are becoming a serious tool to test and trial before making a permanent commitment.

The climate and biodiversity crises call for an urgent response on a systematic scale. This is not something we can resolve through local solutions, and policy is paramount to guide strategic decision-making towards delivering joined up projects with the power to make a real difference. In our quest for neatness in nature, we have designed out much biodiversity, and a wilder urban ecology is the answer to support wildlife, deliver essential ecosystem services, enhance liveability and meet the climate challenges.

Circular approaches challenge the built environment industry and our established methods of design and construction with an emphasis on adaptive, reversible and reusable, or worst case scenario, recycled solutions. Collaborative consumption—the sharing of assets—requires a culture change in how we think about products and the spaces we inhabit. What may seem like a fringe concept is sure to become mainstream as people and businesses increasingly seek out ethical and environmentally responsible solutions with a smaller carbon footprint.

Smart technologies, AI and the Internet of Things are increasingly infiltrating our design processes, enabling more informed decision-making based on data. Emerging tools allow us to better understand key aspects of the urban environment, such as microclimate, carbon, and mobility. Equipped with smarter tech, there is scope to reassess how we move about, and reallocate space for electric and muscle-powered modes of transport to improve air quality and create safer streets. A time-sensitive approach can grant more flexibility in how streets are used, for example as a vehicular route during the day and as an event space in evenings and during weekends.

And with shared agendas and responsibilities, we have the capacity to look beyond red lines and administrative boundaries to take a holistic approach to public space design, balancing strategic

thinking with hyper-local solutions. Cross-sector partnership working can meet differing objectives and motivations through an articulated vision to create meaningful and lasting places that will live on for generations. This requires champions and advocates with the power and perseverance to lead, unite people and make a difference.

There is a suggested agreement therefore that the value of quality public space design and activation has become increasingly clear. Beyond delivering benefits to the community and the individual, an inclusive and sustainable public realm has the power to change the perception of place, reinvigorate neighbourhoods and elevate social and economic values, underpinning the long-term success of new developments.

Glossary

Activation

Activation focuses on transforming spaces that are more likely to make people visit, use, stay and enjoy the space—often with a focus on making spaces more inclusive and welcoming.

Attenuate solar radiation and evapotranspiration

The rate of evapotranspiration varies daily and is directly dependent on solar radiation and other climatic conditions. Factors that affect evapotranspiration include the plant's growth stage or level of maturity, percentage of soil cover, solar radiation, humidity, temperature, and wind.

Business Improvement District (BID)

A business-led and business-funded body, created through a ballot process, to provide mutually-agreed improvements to a defined area in which a levy is charged on all business rate payers based on their rateable value. The BID is funded through this levy but can also utilise other public and private funding streams to develop projects that are intended to provide additional services or improvements to the local area over and above the services already provided by the local authority.

Carbon sequestration

A natural or artificial process by which carbon dioxide is removed from the atmosphere and held in solid or liquid form. It is one of the many approaches being taken to tackle climate change.

Civic landscape/space

The civic landscape incorporates democratic attitudes into urban landscape design and planning. Civic Spaces includes publicly accessible open spaces such as courtyards, greens, parks, pocket parks and playgrounds.

Co-creation

Co-creation involves collaborating with stakeholders to guide the design process, usually through workshops, allowing designers to get a more rounded view of the final design. This participative approach moves away from relying on a single perspective to include broader input.

Healthy Streets

A policy framework that seeks to ensure streets are designed in ways that promote positive health outcomes for the city, to improve air quality, reduce congestion and help make London's diverse communities greener, healthier and more attractive places to live, work, play and do business.

Meanwhile projects

Meanwhile projects experiment with vacant or underutilised spaces, public or private, across the city. These initiatives, located in town centres, greenspaces, or brownfield sites, often aim to test ideas for long-term change.

Placemaking/placeshaping

Placemaking is a participatory process for shaping public space that harnesses the ideas and assets of the people who use it. It focuses on improving health, wellbeing, happiness, and identity of local and national communities. Placemaking allows communities to collectively influence and create spaces that reflect their needs and values.

Public realm/public space

Public realm means places or spaces that are shared by the public. This includes any publicly-owned streets, pathways, right of ways, parks, publicly accessible open spaces and any public or civic building, or facility.

Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS)

SuDS are drainage solutions that provide an alternative to the direct channelling of surface water through networks of pipes and sewers to nearby watercourses. By mimicking natural drainage regimes, SuDS aim to reduce surface water flooding, improve water quality and enhance the amenity and biodiversity value of the environment.

Notes

- 1 <https://nla.london/new-london-agenda>
- 2 <https://trustforlondon.org.uk/data/population-over-time>
- 3 <https://unhabitat.org/topic/public-space>
- 4 <https://www.london.gov.uk/publications/public-london-charter>
- 5 <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayors-bold-plan-will-overhaul-capitals-streets>
- 6 <https://tfl.gov.uk/corporate/about-tfl/how-we-work/planning-for-the-future/healthy-streets>
- 7 <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/may/17/superblocks-rescue-barcelona-spain-plan-give-streets-back-residents>
- 8 <https://www.publicspace.org/works/-/project/k081-poblenou-s-superblock>
- 9 <https://openstreetsproject.org>
- 10 <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/services/streets/transport-strategy>
- 11 <https://nationalparkcity.london/london-national-park-city>
- 12 https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/fileadmin/uploads/dc/Documents/urban-green-nation-summary1_0.pdf
- 13 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/biodiversity-net-gain>
- 14 <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/parks-green-spaces-and-biodiversity/london-rewilding-taskforce>
- 15 Guidance on SuDS design and integration can be found in the Transport for London report 'SuDS in London—a guide'
<https://content.tfl.gov.uk/sustainable-urban-drainage-november-2016.pdf>
- 16 Waltham Forest was the first ever London Borough of Culture, and will be succeeded by Croydon in 2023–2025, Wandsworth in 2025–2027 and Haringey in 2027–2029
<https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/arts-and-culture/current-culture-projects/london-borough-culture/london-borough-culture-2019-waltham-forest>
- 17 <https://nla.london/insights/living-learning-legacy-queen-elizabeth-olympic-park>
- 18 <https://nla.london/insights/circular-london-building-a-renewable-city>
- 19 <https://nla.london/insights/great-estates-models-for-modern-placemaking>

Further reading

NLA:

Great Estates: Models for modern placemaking
February 2024

Circular London: Building a renewable city
July 2023

Living, learning, legacy: Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park
September 2022

Local London: Building resilient neighbourhoods
December 2021

Public London: 10 years of transforming spaces
April 2015

nla.london/insights

GLA:

Public London Charter
<https://www.london.gov.uk/publications/public-london-charter>

Making London child friendly
https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/ggbd_making_london_child-friendly.pdf

Safety in public space: Women, girls and gender diverse people
<https://www.london.gov.uk/media/99003/download>

Night-time strategy guidance
<https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/arts-and-culture/24-hour-london/night-time-strategy-guidance>

Design guidance for green and thriving public spaces
C40, 2024

Londoners making London: Transforming neighbourhoods
By Jan Kattein
Lund Humphries, 2024

Healthy placemaking: Wellbeing through urban design
By Fred London
RIBA Publishing, 2020

Meanwhile city: How temporary intervention create welcoming places with a string identity
by Petra Marko and Radim Lisa
Milk, 2022

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Champions

GREYSTAR®

Greystar has invested £11.5bn of institutional capital into UK housing over the last 10 years to build a portfolio of 11,000 rental homes and 35,000 purpose-built student accommodation beds (including pipeline). We are vertically integrated platform meaning that we invest in, develop, and manage rental housing for customers including students, young professionals, and families.

At a time when landlords are leaving the private rented sector, purpose-built and professionally managed rental housing can provide high quality housing underpinned by the customer service renters should expect. We continue to invest throughout the economic cycle and are long term partners with a personal stake in contributing to the wider community.

Brookfield Properties

Brookfield Properties is a leading global developer and operator of high-quality real estate assets. We are active in nearly all real estate sectors, including office, retail, multifamily, hospitality, and logistics, operating more than 1000 properties and over 380 million square feet of real estate in gateway markets on behalf of Brookfield Asset Management, one of the largest asset managers in the world.

With a focus on sustainability, a commitment to excellence, and the drive for relentless innovation in the planning, development, and management of buildings and their surroundings, Brookfield Properties is reimagining real estate from the ground up.

For more information, visit www.brookfieldproperties.com



QUINTAIN

We are the team behind Wembley Park, one of London's most exciting new neighbourhoods. Once complete, it will be the largest single site of Build to Rent in the UK. The 85-acre Wembley Park is masterplanned to have 8,500 new homes, with over 6,000 operated by our rental management team, Quintain Living.

During our 30-year history we have transformed assets into places where people want to live, companies want to grow and neighbourhoods can come alive. Specialists in development and asset management we operate buildings for others as well as ourselves.

AtkinsRéalis

We're AtkinsRéalis, a world-leading design, engineering and project management organization. We connect people, data and technology to transform the world's infrastructure and energy systems.

We design and deliver major projects on the built and natural environments all around the world. We believe that digitally enabled engineering has the power to radically improve the way we are all housed, connected, powered, and protected and can change our relationship with our communities and our planet for the better. Together, with our industry partners and clients, and our global team of consultants, designers, engineers and project managers, we can change the world.

Supporters

Gillespies

Gillespies is a diverse, free-thinking team of landscape architects, landscape planners, masterplanners and urban designers based in London, Oxford, Manchester, and Leeds. The practice is committed to designing intelligently with nature to build exceptional settings for unique stories to unfold while protecting the earth's equilibrium.

The practice was established over 60 years ago, and its creative team hasn't stopped learning since. From small rooftop gardens and community parks to city masterplans, every project delivers unique settings that bring people together to share meaningful experiences, promoting harmony between people and the environment.



The City of London Corporation provides local government services for its residents and businesses, located in the financial and commercial heart of Britain, the City of London. It is committed to maintaining and enhancing the status of the City as both the world's leading international financial and business centre, as well as a vibrant, seven day and evening leisure destination, through the policies it pursues and the high standard of services it provides. Its responsibilities extend far beyond the City boundaries in that it also provides a host of additional facilities for the benefit of the nation.



Momentum is an integrated transport consultancy and our aim is that communities benefit from our strategies and the recommendations we make. We work closely with clients and industry partners – from architects, planners and property associations to developers and local authorities – to create forward-looking transport solutions that address the needs of the future city. People are always at the centre of our work.

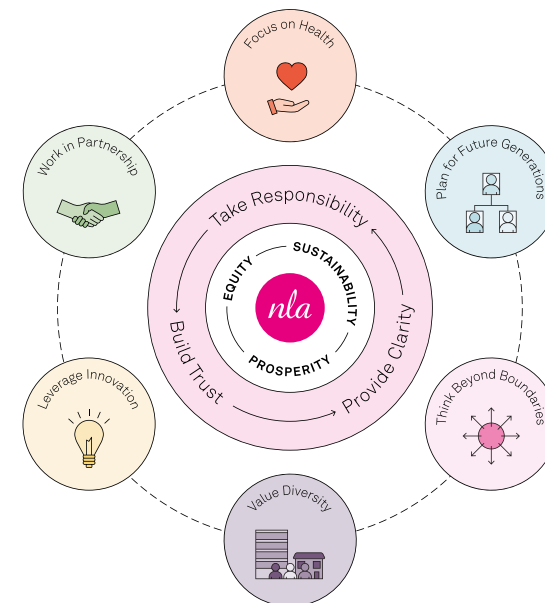
Further overview of our project portfolio, services, staff and topical blogs can be found on our website: momentum-transport.com



NLA is London's built environment community; a membership organisation for everyone with an interest in London's built environment. Its purpose is to help make London a better place to live, work and visit. Its mission is to engage with professionals, politicians and the public to deliver positive change in the city.

NLA's activities include events, exhibitions, tours, research, publications, learning, websites and social media, awards and competitions, as well as the London Festival of Architecture. NLA's public gallery and event space, The London Centre, is based in the City of London and hosts its London Models.

As part of NLA's mission of shaping a better city, we introduced the New London Agenda. Developed from 18 years of experience in placemaking and input from over 400 stakeholders, this framework sets the stage for equitable, sustainable, and prosperous city-making. With values like Taking Responsibility, Providing Clarity, and Building Trust, and guided by the 'Six Pillars of Placemaking', this agenda ensures London's built environment community works together to shape a better city.



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