



## Open Call Gateways to Whitechapel Market



Whitechapel Market © Luke O'Donovan

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### The commission

NLA has partnered with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets to invite architects, landscape architects, designers and artists to propose, develop and submit a design proposal for new visual focal points that act as 'gateways' to Whitechapel Market.

The competition seeks public realm proposals that celebrate the unique character of Whitechapel and its community, transforming key locations along Whitechapel Road to better signify the market and welcome both locals and visitors. The goal is to commission an innovative and impactful design that enhances the public realm and serves the local community more effectively.

Up to six teams will be shortlisted for Round 2, each receiving an honorarium of £2,000 + VAT to further develop their proposals. A temporary exhibition of shortlisted designs will be displayed publicly in early Autumn 2025, inviting

community feedback. The winning team will be announced in September, with installation targeted for Summer 2026 to coincide with the London Festival of Architecture 2026.

This document should be read in conjunction with [HAR6080 Gateways to Whitechapel Market: ITT Instructions](#), which contains full information on the submission process, including required tender documentation, screening and evaluation criteria.

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## Context

### Whitechapel Market

Whitechapel Road is the cultural and historical heart of Whitechapel, and home to its iconic street market. The area and market are protected by the Whitechapel Market Conservation. It is experiencing rapid transformation with the arrival of Crossrail, the Council's new Town Hall, and other forthcoming investments. London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH) and Transport for London (TfL) are working in partnership to improve the area in response to emerging developments.

Whitechapel Road has local, neighbourhood and strategic roles. It is a key transport corridor from Stratford into the City, and a thriving centre for commerce, shopping, and leisure, with a distinct local identity. However, the area suffers a number of challenges, including a lack of seating, street clutter, and poor-quality pavements which contribute to the unattractive environment and impact pedestrian flows. There is also a lack of infrastructure to support the market including power, waste management and storage solutions.

### Whitechapel Road Improvements Programme

The significant changes in the area, and rise in the profile and function of Whitechapel Road, present an opportunity to deliver improvements to the area. Led by the Council's Regeneration Team, the Whitechapel Road Improvements Programme (WRIP) focuses on the area of Whitechapel Road from the junctions with New Road and Vallance Road, to Cambridge Heath Road and Sydney Street.

The WRIP comprises three strands:

- Public Realm: enhancements to the quality, organisation and functionality of the street to increase accessibility, wayfinding and safety, and clearly define spaces for different uses and activities.
- Market Stalls: upgrades to stalls to create a consistent design and improved shopping environment
- Market Management: Determining a vision for the long-term success of the market and improving the day-to-day function of the market operations.



The gateways will aim to compliment the work being done as part of the Whitechapel Road Improvements Programme. Planning reference PA/24/01403 can be used to find further information available on the project.



CGI of Whitechapel Market Improvements Project

## Department of Health and Social Care Life Sciences Development

Redevelopment of the buildings on the corner of New Road and Whitechapel Road, with retention of one building for provision of space for flexible life science purpose uses, gallery and exhibition uses, research, development and teaching purposes, and a café. The development is currently in planning to be an erection of multiple buildings that range between circa 4 to 15 storeys. Planning reference PA/21/02707/A1 can be used to find further information available on the project.



CGI of "Plot A2"

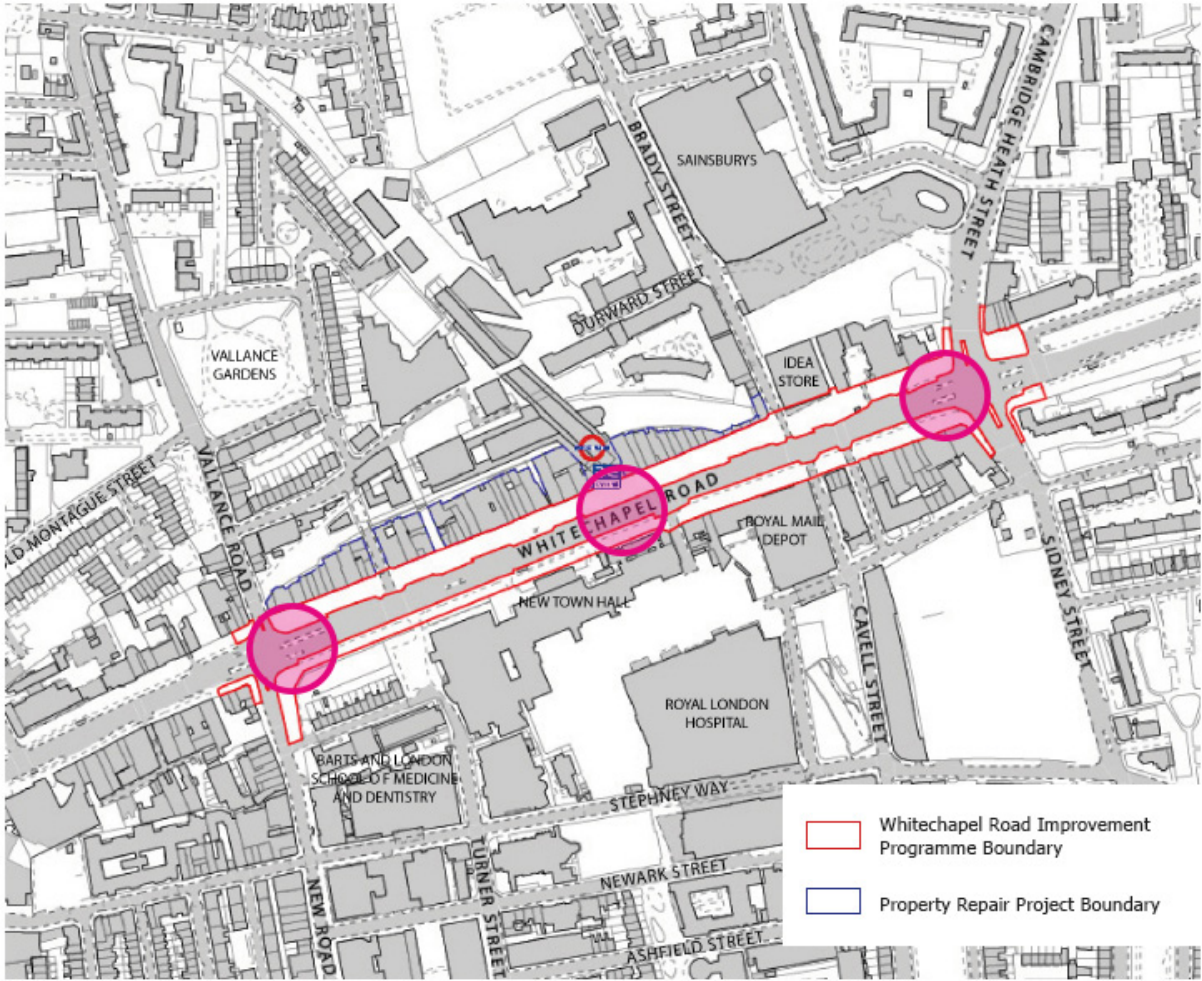
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## The Sites

There are three main entry points to Whitechapel Market. The **West Gateway** is located at the junction of Whitechapel Road, Vallance Road, and New Road. The **Station Gateway** marks the heart of the market, serving as a key arrival point for those coming from the station. The **East Gateway** sits at the intersection of Whitechapel Road, Cambridge Heath Road, and Sidney Street.

Both the west and east gateways suffer from a lack of seating, street clutter, and poor-quality pavements. There are no clear visual cues or markers to signify the presence of the market at these points.





Site Location Plan



Site Photos, West Gateway (Left), Station Gateway (Middle), East Gateway (Right)

Design Requirements



The applicant should provide creative design solutions for localised site-specific public realm interventions at three locations along Whitechapel Road. These new permanent installations should signal these gateways into Whitechapel Market.

Overall, the key objectives of the project are to deliver a series of public realm interventions that:

- Are unique, bold and visually striking
- Signal the entries into Whitechapel Market with significant gateway markers or art pieces
- Celebrate and respect the character and history of Whitechapel, ensuring designs complement the existing streetscape and comply with the Whitechapel Market Conservation area.
- Prioritise pedestrian road safety, noting the limited available pedestrian space at the Vallance Road junction site.
- Doesn't inhibit vehicular traffic
- Improve accessibility and connectivity through enhanced wayfinding
- Embrace and reflect the richness of Whitechapel's diverse communities and market
- Contribute to creating a welcome environment to bring tourists and visitors together to showcase Whitechapel's unique identity
- Compliment the work being done as part of the Whitechapel Road Improvements Project, without any duplication.
- Is appropriately lit and does not impede good sight lines
- Encourage intergenerational sociability throughout the day and night and are not likely to encourage dominance of the space by a single group of people
- Aligns well with Co-Design Principles.
- Considers circular economy principals, being consistent with longevity to avoid premature end of life.

The winning scheme may include – but is not limited to – the following components:

- Signage referencing the entrance to Whitechapel Market
- Public art
- Planting and greening
- Elevated gateway (bridge like)
- Smaller meeting areas
- Moving digital art
- Sculptures

Further guidance:

- Designs should consider materials and design quality
- Any winning design will be robust enough to withstand all weather conditions
- The proposal must be safe for public use (deter anti-social behaviour and not encourage sleeping, skateboarding or acting as a bike stand)
- Designs should not obstruct pedestrian flow or act as barriers to views across the road
- The project will need to aim for permanence, and you should consider the longevity and appearance of your design accordingly, to ensure that little or no maintenance is required during this period. Where maintenance is

required, the design should include clear consideration of how access for maintenance will be safely and effectively managed.

- Materials that require long term care are discouraged from being used.
- Where possible the final installation should be able to be constructed or assembled in situ
- The junction with Vallance Road has a coffee kiosk on the north side. This creates limited space for pedestrian traffic flow and any proposals should not make the existing arrangement any worse.
- Non-movable elements rather than movable elements are encouraged
- To include accessibility considerations, allowing people with different abilities to interact with the interventions. Seating elements should consider back rests and armrests where needed.

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## Project Background

The original concept for this project involved incorporating tensile structures as gateway markers. However, various challenges, such as height, size, visual obstruction and anchoring requirements, meant that this was not an entirely appropriate solution.

Tower Hamlets are looking for submissions that capture some of the spirit and intent behind the original idea, with a focus on visually signifying the market and providing opportunities for gathering or dwelling near the market stalls.



CGI of umbrella structures

## Executive Mayor's Vision Statement

“ In thinking about how we might create a series of landmarks and gateways to the famous Whitechapel market I was initially keen on the idea of introducing a number of umbrella structures similar to those shown in the image above, however this concept proved to present a number of technical and logistical challenges. The market is hugely significant to the Borough and its residents, with its rich history and important place in the local economy. This project envisions the creation of artistic calling points at the major gateways to Whitechapel Market with distinctive landmarks that celebrate the area's cultural richness, foster social interaction, and enhance the public realm. While not necessarily replicating the umbrella structures themselves, the concept should draw from their symbolic and aesthetic power to inform a design language that is uniquely Whitechapel. These interventions aim to transform the streetscape into a series of memorable, inclusive, and meaningful spaces that speak to the historic importance of the area. It is envisioned that this will create places that invite gathering, reflection, and pride in local identity, while supporting the broader vision for a more connected, and culturally expressive urban environment.”

- Mayor of Tower Hamlets

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## Budget

The total budget available for this project is £1,800,000 + VAT. This needs to include all fees, fabrication, installation, other capital costs and contingency. Minimum contingency within the budget should be 10%, although we recommend allocating 15% contingency in your stage 2 submission, if shortlisted.

The fabrication and installation of the winning design will be subject to a separate tender exercise in line with the procurement rules of Tower Hamlets.

The budget outlined above includes an indicative amount of 12.5% of total budget to cover on-going design fees and other management costs required to deliver the winning concept. If your practice is not VAT registered, you will need to consider this when preparing your budget.

The winning team will be expected to undertake the following tasks:

- Provide a feasible and on-budget design intervention that is robust enough to be in the public realm permanently
- Consult with key stakeholders, local residents and businesses, and community and cultural organisations
- Project management, design supervisory role during the construction of winning design

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## Submissions requirements



This competition has two stages.

This first stage submission should be single PDF submission of no more than 10-pages and maximum 5MB and include the information below. Alternatively, you can submit your application in another format (e.g. video) but the content should not exceed the equivalent of a '10-page limit'.

Your submission should include the following:

Your experience:

- Brief biographies of all the project team.
- A 200-word description about your practice along with any relevant technical and consultation experience acquired through previous projects.
- A selection of relevant previous work, including images.

**Your response to the brief.** Please provide reflections on the following prompts:

- The overall design brief - why you are interested in being involved in the project and what are your initial reactions to the brief and proposed sites?
- Your initial vision for the project
- Your approach to working with the local community and stakeholders to inform and design your proposal if selected

You can submit your response to these prompts in any format. For guidance, this should be (equivalent to) a short paragraph of max. 300 words per prompt or 90 second video per prompt.

No design work or feedback on cost expectations is required for the first stage.

**At the first stage, applicants will be required to complete the Procurement Specific Questionnaire on the Portal.**

Submissions need to be uploaded and submitted via the Portal: [HAR6080 Gateways to Whitechapel Market](#)

In addition to the 10-page PDF outlined above, all applicants must submit a response to the **Procurement Specific Questionnaire** as included on the Portal.

For more information on the Evaluation of the Procurement Specific Questionnaire, refer to section 3.2 in the [HAR6080 Gateways to Whitechapel Market: ITT Instructions](#).

## **Shortlisting**

Submissions will be shortlisted by the judging panel. Up to six shortlisted practices will then be invited to develop a design concept based on the information laid out in this open call and will be awarded an honorarium of £2,000 + VAT each. The work

required for the second phase of the project will be reflective of the honorarium sum.

At shortlisting, the second stage submission should include:

- Maximum 10-page PDF explaining your proposal to be shared with the jury for review, prior to interview. Your submission should (but is not limited to) include:
  - 2 x Boards which present your design to a public audience for consultation. Templates to be provided by NLA if shortlisted.
  - Detailed design drawings (we accept a variety of formats including hand or computer drawn 3D design visualisation)
  - Key construction details drawn to scale, with key dimensions noted
  - An outline of all materials, budget\*, delivery and fabrication process
- PowerPoint presentation for the purposes of judging

\*If your practice is not VAT registered, you will need to consider this when preparing your budget.

### **Submission information**

For any questions about the submission process, please contact:

Tower Hamlets  
Public Procurement Organisation Number: PQBL-2673-MVYG  
New Town Hall, 160 Whitechapel Road London  
London  
E1 1BJ  
United Kingdom  
Contact name: Ms Kelly Kerr  
Telephone: +44 244778066  
Email: [kelly.kerr@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:kelly.kerr@towerhamlets.gov.uk)  
Website: <http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk>

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### **Eligibility**

The competition is open to architects, designers, artists and other creatives. We encourage collaborations; however, the project team must include a qualified architect or landscape architect if selected as the winning team.

The judges are interested in seeing applicants from local designers or those who are collaborating with local groups. We are inviting larger architecture or design practices to team up with smaller studios or other creatives for this project.

The judges also strongly encourage submissions from, or collaborations with groups who are underrepresented in architecture. They are particularly interested in

seeing applications from local designers or those working in partnership with community groups based in Whitechapel.

Judges will also encourage teams to demonstrate diversity in their composition, ensuring that the project reflects the cultural richness and inclusive spirit of the local community.

Please note that, as stated in the ITT document, bidders must have an annual turnover of at least twice the contract value of £200k to be further considered. For consortium bids, the combined annual turnover of all consortium members will be assessed to meet this requirement. This approach is designed to encourage collaborative bids, including those from smaller practices working together.

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## Deadline and submission details

- Deadline for first submission is Midday Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> July. Submissions received after time this will not be considered.
- To send your expression of interest in a PDF format go [here](#).
- The PDF should be no more than 5MB and 10 A4 pages (both portrait or landscape are acceptable)
- You will receive an email confirming the receipt of your submission.

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## Schedule outline

**Submissions open:** Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> June

**Submissions closed:** 12:00, Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> July

**Successful shortlisted teams notified:** w/c 11<sup>th</sup> August

**Site visit with shortlisted teams:** 10:00-12:00, Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> August

**Round 2 submission deadline:** Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> September

**Public Exhibition of Shortlisted Designs:** 22<sup>nd</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> September

**Final judging / interviews:** w/c 29<sup>th</sup> September

**Winner notified:** w/c 29<sup>th</sup> September

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## Judging panel

The judging panel will be made up of a number of experts and local representatives and will be announced before the round one submission deadline.

NLA Chair – Rosa Rogina, Director, London Festival of Architecture

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## Judging criteria

### Round 1



At round one expressions of interests will be given two scores:

- **Practice/team profile (60%)**

Does the team have skilled professionals for delivering the proposal in line with eligibility outlined in the Open Call? Does the team have a diverse set of skills and experience? Are the previous work experiences and/or their work methodologies and wider design aspirations relevant to the competition? Does the team proposed align with the eligibility criteria stated in the brief?

- **Initial vision/response to the brief (40%)**

Does the proposal's initial written reflection to the brief suggest innovation, surprise and creativity? Does it explore a new and original way to use and engage with the area? Is the team thinking beyond possible barriers or restrictions, and pondering how they might be broken down? Is the vision something which could be developed into an appropriate and achievable scheme for the area, in line with the brief?

## **Round 2**

At round two design proposals, budgets and supporting documentation will be assessed on five criteria.

- Overall Design (30%)
- Costs and Feasibility (25%)
- Safety and Equity (15%)
- Sustainability and Longevity (15%)
- Contextual Design and Public Engagement (15%)

Our evaluation criteria are alignment with [New London Agenda](#) – NLA's framework for best practice in city-making. The jury will be assessing submissions on the criteria above as well as the six pillars of placemaking set out in the agenda.

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## **Access**

Accessibility, diversity and inclusion are core values of the NLA at all levels of our organisation, and we are committed to delivering projects that are representative of the whole city and can be enjoyed by everyone. At the same time, we recognise that there are still significant barriers for groups in our society to be able to enjoy and participate in festival activity.

We will support with any resources and adjustments for anyone who needs it, to make applying for this role easier e.g. alternative document formats, interpreters, hybrid meetings. In the application form you will be asked how we can support you throughout the process; this will not influence your application.

[www.londonfestivalofarchitecture.org/access/](http://www.londonfestivalofarchitecture.org/access/)

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## Further information

- Submissions will be judged on originality, demonstration of creativity, relevance to the brief as well as feasibility and how the proposal works in the context of the site.
- To process entries to this competition we will share your application, and any associated personal data provided on the application with our jury and competition partners.
- All applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application, but due to the volume of submissions we may not be able to provide feedback to entrants individually.
- Applicants may not be assisted in any way in their submission by members of the judging panel, the client body, organisers, members of their family, close business associates or employees.
- The ownership of Copyright of the design will be in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, that is Copyright rests with the author of the submitted design.
- All designs remain the intellectual property of the designer however the winning design will itself when built will be the property of Tower Hamlets.
- Please bear in mind the project requires a fast turn around and may have peak moments when your practice will need to dedicate sufficient staff to deliver the project on time, to budget and to the high standard expected by all stakeholders.
- If your practice/collaboration is appointed to deliver the project it will need to have the following insurance: Employers Liability, Professional Indemnity, Public Liability.
- Significant efforts are made by all stakeholders of the project to ensure wide media coverage.
- NLA reserve the right to use images from the submissions for promotional purposes in press, social media and publications. All endeavours will be made to ensure accurate accreditation.

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## Useful links

Submission Instructions:

[HAR6080 Gateways to Whitechapel Market: ITT Instructions.](#)

Tender:

[HAR6080 Gateways to Whitechapel Market](#)

Proactis submission portal:

[HAR6080 Gateways to Whitechapel Market](#)

NLA:

[www.nla.london](http://www.nla.london)

London Festival of Architecture:

[www.londonfestivalofarchitecture.org](http://www.londonfestivalofarchitecture.org)

London Borough of Tower Hamlets:

[www.towerhamlets.gov.uk](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk)

Whitechapel Road Improvements Programme:

[www.talk.towerhamlets.gov.uk](http://www.talk.towerhamlets.gov.uk)

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## Contact

To submit your entry please go [here](#).

Tower Hamlets

Public Procurement Organisation Number: PQBL-2673-MVYG

New Town Hall, 160 Whitechapel Road London

London

E1 1BJ

United Kingdom

Contact name: Ms Kelly Kerr

Telephone: +44 244778066

Email: [kelly.kerr@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:kelly.kerr@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

Website: <http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk>

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## Disclaimer

The competition organisers are not liable for lost, misdirected, or late entries.

Decisions of the jury represent their professional judgments and all decisions are final. While it is the intent to construct the winning scheme, the organisers reserve the right to not proceed with construction for any reason. Material submitted by you shall be your sole responsibility, shall not infringe or violate the rights of any other party or violate any laws, contribute to or encourage infringing or otherwise unlawful conduct, or otherwise be obscene, objectionable, or in poor taste. By submitting such material, you are representing that you are the owner of such material and/or have all necessary rights, licenses, and authorization to distribute it.

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## Commissioning organisations



London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Tower Hamlets Council is the local authority for one of London's most diverse and dynamic boroughs. Home to a vibrant mix of communities, Tower Hamlets combines rich cultural heritage with thriving business districts, including Canary Wharf and the City Fringe. The council deals with everything from schools to care of older people, from roads to rubbish, libraries and local planning. It is committed to delivering high-quality services, promoting equality and inclusion, and creating opportunities for all residents. Through innovation, collaboration, and community engagement, Tower Hamlets Council works to build a fairer, safer, and more sustainable future for everyone who lives and works in the borough.

[towerhamlets.gov.uk](https://towerhamlets.gov.uk)

Facebook: [@TowerHamletsCouncil](https://www.facebook.com/TowerHamletsCouncil)

X: [@TowerHamletsNow](https://twitter.com/TowerHamletsNow)

Instagram: [@towerhamletsnow](https://www.instagram.com/towerhamletsnow)

LinkedIn: [@london-borough-of-tower-hamlets](https://www.linkedin.com/company/@london-borough-of-tower-hamlets)

Bluesky: [@towerhamletsnow](https://bsky.app/profile/@towerhamletsnow)

YouTube: [@towerhamletscouncil](https://www.youtube.com/@towerhamletscouncil)

WhatsApp: [Tower Hamlets Council Channel](https://www.whatsapp.com/channel/0029va233333333333333333)



## NLA

NLA is London's built environment community, a cross-sector membership organisation for everyone committed to shaping a better city. Our 30,000+ members work across all aspects of city governance, planning, design, development, and management, spanning public and private sectors. Guided by the New London Agenda - our best practice framework for city-making - we come together year-round to develop new collective solutions for London: forming new ideas and partnerships, enhancing lifelong skills, and empowering a more diverse workforce. Our work has global relevance and is shared with cities worldwide.

[nla.london](https://nla.london)

Instagram: [@nlalondon](https://www.instagram.com/nlalondon)

X: [@nlalondon](https://twitter.com/nlalondon)

LinkedIn: [@NLA](https://www.linkedin.com/company/@NLA)



**Ninety Four Group**

Ninety Four Group is a London-based consultancy specialising in Project and Programme Management. We work across both the Public and Private Sectors, providing tailored and innovative solutions to guide clients through complex projects from start to finish. With an agile team of professionals from diverse project delivery backgrounds, Ninety Four Group look to implement our own brand of Project Management which embodies a commitment to delivering projects with precision, reliability, and strategic foresight.

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