

Appendix 2: Destination City Review – response from initial fact-finding

Destination City review – summary of progress

1. Alongside a literature review, I have met with 61 people to discuss their experience of, and insight into, Destination City. This comprises 35 officers, 13 members and 13 colleagues from businesses and relevant organisations.

2. Key findings so far are that Destination City has become successfully established as a flagship City of London Corporation programme since its launch in May 2022. Notably, the aspiration of Destination City commands support and advocacy from businesses outside the Corporation, as well as internally. The initial targets set for Destination City were to increase visitor numbers by 5% from a peak of 21 million in 2019 to 22 million by 2025; and to increase spend by 7.5% from £2.1 billion in 2019 to £2.25 billion in 2025. The City has recovered well over the past year although the distribution of both visitor numbers and spend has markedly redistributed over the 7 day week – itself an example of how post-pandemic demand is significantly different from the pre-pandemic era.

3. In the past 18 months, Destination City has set a confident and outward-looking mission for the Square Mile in a positive, commercial and ‘can do’ tone.

4. Although the aspiration of Destination City commands widespread recognition, interpretations of the vision vary, and a degree of confusion exists as to the purpose and remit of the Destination City team in Innovation & Growth. For example, is Destination City a 3 year programme to ensure the Square Mile recovers and exceeds its pre-pandemic footfall and spend? Alternatively, is the ambition for Destination City longer term and transformational? How is professional and political accountability for Destination City effectively discharged, and what is the relationship between Destination City and the anticipated cultural strategy? Should Destination City be seen as the central officer team located in Innovation & Growth, or a collaborative partnership between the CoLC, businesses and cultural institutions? How can the programme quickly become data driven, in order to assess a commercial return on investment?

5. The review methodology enables these questions to be addressed through a participative process that draws on the richness of experiences and insights within and outside the Corporation. In the weeks and months ahead, there is every opportunity for members, officers and third parties to engage in this work to achieve the desired clarity of vision, governance, accountability and performance management.

6. At this interim stage, and to provide a transparent sense of direction, what I have heard so far inclines towards the Destination City programme being a long-term plan for the Square Mile as a magnetic business destination, visitor destination and creative, entrepreneurial place to live and work. The way that people live and work now has changed so fundamentally – ‘bleisure’ and the need for the Square Mile to “earn the commute” requires sociable and attractive offices set within a lively and atmospheric streetscape experience.

7. Building on this vision, the programme should be collaborative between all CoLC departments, cultural institutions and the business community embedded within a governance structure that utilises existing expertise.

8. A focus on visitor numbers and spend needs to be balanced with attention to social inclusion and equity – Destination City must embrace the City’s long-standing and impressive commitment to serving the public good.

9. Destination City is therefore not only about place marketing (although this is essential and needs more attention) but the future development of a liveable, lively and connected City in a uniquely historic, cultural and characterful setting. Future decisions on allocation of the Destination City programme budget should flow from this collaborative approach.

10. Professional leadership of Destination City requires Board level orchestration of the City’s exceptionally impressive capabilities and cultural assets working closely with business partners. In the development of a new cultural strategy, consideration needs to be given to spatial, temporal and community approaches that enable well planned, coordinated and sustained programmes of activity.