

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Resource Allocation Sub-Committee	Dated: 25/06/2025
Subject: Blackfriars Bridge Foreshore, Victoria Embankment, EC47 0AF(Thames Tideway Project) – City property asset re-purposing and options appraisal	Public report: RASC – For Information
This proposal: • delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes	Vibrant Thriving Destination
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	Yes
If so, how much?	£25,000
What is the source of Funding?	City Surveyor's Local Risk budget
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	Yes
Report of: City Surveyor and Executive Director of Property (CS.145/25)	
Report author:	Tom Hodgkiss Principal Surveyor Corporate Property Group

Summary

The Thames Tideway Tunnel's Blackfriars Foreshore site, managed by Bazalgette Tunnel Limited (Tideway), is nearing completion, with full operational readiness achieved in May 2025 and final landscaping due by September 2025. The site includes three distinct areas: land designated to Thames Water, a City Walkway section, and the undercroft and former underground rifle range, both of which are the focus of an ongoing repurposing review. See Appendix 1.

The undercroft open area, historically closed due to anti-social behaviour, and the former rifle range, are now being reviewed for potential reuse, including proposals for a sporting facility, an energy centre, or commercial income. However, legal clarity on ownership, particularly in relation to TfL, is required before progressing. The City Solicitor is of the initial opinion this land is within the City's ownership; however, this is being confirmed with TfL and an update on these matters is expected at the RASC Committee meeting on 9 September 2025.

It is intended to commission external advice, at a cost up to £25,000 funded from the City Surveyors local risk budget, to explore the redevelopment potential of the undercroft and use for the former rifle range. The brief will include an assessment of commercial opportunities and estimated costs to provide, such as retail kiosks, food and beverage outlets, and flexible, programmable space, as well as non-commercial uses, including a proposed sports facility e.g. skateboard facility as part of the City's Sports Strategy. This will ensure future decisions are informed, strategic, viable and aligned with the City's placemaking objectives.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to note the following:

1. Note the undercroft and former rifle range areas are being returned to the City following Thames Tideway's occupation, but legal clarity (as to ownership of entire site, access rights etc) is required before any asset allocation or redevelopment can proceed.
2. Note early ideas for the site include converting the undercroft into a sports facility and repurposing the former rifle range as an energy centre. Both spaces also present potential for commercial use; however, the precise nature of any future use remains to be explored and determined. Further feasibility work is dependent on the resolution of existing legal and operational constraints.
3. Note the Environment Department are overseeing the Tideway works to ensure compliance with the Development Consent Order, handover back to the City Surveyor for ongoing management will follow upon project completion, currently anticipated in September 2025.
4. Note that officers will commission external advice aimed at exploring the potential of the undercroft and former rifle range with the costs to be met from the City Surveyor's local risk budget.
5. Note a further report on costed options will be reported to your committee in early 2026.

Main Report

Overview

1. The Blackfriars Foreshore site, part of the Thames Tideway Tunnel programme, is approaching final handover. Delivered by Bazalgette Tunnel Limited (Tideway), the site is a flagship location designed to intercept combined sewer overflows and enhance the Thames riverside with new public space. Operational readiness was achieved in early 2025, with full integration completed by May. Final landscaping and public realm works are scheduled for completion by September 2025.
2. The site comprises three distinct elements:
 - **Thames Water Land:** The majority of the new foreshore, to be privately managed by Thames Water and including a public café.
 - **City Walkway:** A designated pedestrian route through the Thames Water land and City owned land, ensuring reinstatement of the continuous riverside access. This will be maintained by City Operations (Streets & Spaces).
 - **Undercroft and Rifle Range:** Two enclosed areas (approx. 700m² and 280m² respectively) that are the focus of this report. The Rifle Range sits below the Undercroft with shared access. Public Toilets are being reinstated at the Western end of the Undercroft.

Site History and Current Status

3. Since 2017, Tideway has occupied the undercroft and rifle range to support construction activities. Historically associated with anti-social behaviour, the undercroft has remained hoarded and inaccessible for decades. While colleagues in the Environment team previously recognised its potential for a park

or riverside development, there was no budget or intention to adopt, maintain, or manage the site. Should a box park or more substantial development prove viable—subject to assessment by the City Surveyor—it could offer a valuable local amenity. The site is not designated as City Walkway or public highway and therefore falls outside the remit of City Operations, though it remains subject to planning controls.

4. The rifle range, a sub-basement space, was formerly managed by the Investment Property Group (IPG). It was not considered viable for long-term investment, and it is proposed to be re-allocated as a corporate asset to be managed by RA-Sub.

Design and Handover Requirements

5. The site's design and delivery are governed by the Development Consent Order (DCO) framework. The District Surveyor's Structures Team has overseen technical compliance. As part of the DCO, Tideway will reinstate a secure hoarding to the undercroft. This structure, designed to meet wind load requirements, is supported by a removable steel frame and ensures the area remains secure and safe once the Bazalgette Embankment opens to the public.

Strategic Opportunity and Constraints

6. With the surrounding public realm nearing completion, the undercroft and rifle range present a timely opportunity for strategic placemaking. However, progress is contingent on resolving legal uncertainties. While most of the land is under City title, some areas remain unregistered, and there is potential for overlapping claims by Transport for London (TfL) under the GLA Roads and Side Roads (Transfer of Property) Order 2000.
7. The City Solicitor is currently engaging with TfL to confirm ownership and address any operational concerns, including inspection rights for the flyover above. These discussions are critical, as any requirement for structural clearance could limit redevelopment options.

Emerging Proposals

8. Three early-stage proposals have been identified:
 - **Sports Facility:** The Sport Strategy & Engagement team has proposed converting the undercroft into a dedicated space for skateboarding and wheeled sports. The estimated capital cost for this initiative is £350,000. This figure does not currently account for bridge safeguarding measures or ongoing operational management. While funding has yet to be secured, potential sources include the London Marathon Charitable Trust and the CIL Neighbourhood Fund. To assess feasibility and community interest, a temporary skate park installation could be trialled at a lower projected cost.
 - **Energy Centre:** The Energy & Sustainability Team, supported by engineering consultants Arup, are assessing the viability of repurposing the rifle range to host low carbon heat generation plant for supplying a future large scale heat network in this area of the Square Mile which could decarbonise many buildings in support of our Climate Action Strategy 2040 net zero ambition. The outcome of this assessment is pending.

- **Commercial Activation:** Subject to feasibility and legal clearance, options such as retail kiosks, food and beverage outlets, or a flexible event space will be explored. These could generate revenue and enhance the vibrancy of the riverside.
9. The City's Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) have also expressed interest in developing social spaces to support local businesses in the Blackfriars and Fleet Street area.
 10. The undercroft and rifle range may be best treated as separate opportunities, given their differing characteristics and constraints. Future uses should also complement the newly delivered Bazalgette Embankment public realm, enhancing its function and integration rather than duplicating or conflicting with it.

Legal and Operational Dependencies

11. Before any proposal can proceed, the following must be resolved:
12. Confirmation of City ownership and any residual TfL claims.
13. Clarification of access rights, particularly for TfL-owned walkways adjacent to the site.
14. Assessment of structural constraints related to the flyover above the undercroft.
15. These factors will determine the viability of each option and inform the scope of future feasibility work.
16. It is important to note that we cannot take for granted that TfL's in-house lawyer will engage with us with urgency. There may be delays due to a lack of engagement, which could impact the overall timeline of the project.
17. The City Solicitor will also need to liaise with the City Bridge Foundation from the perspective of safeguarding the bridge, which is paramount. As a result, certain uses will be prohibited in the section of the undercroft under the bridge. No decision can be made on the further use of the space before we have established this and what maintenance and inspection access needs to be afforded to TfL.

Next Steps

18. Pending legal confirmation, the City Surveyor will:
19. Oversee and coordinate the transfer of ownership of the Undercroft and Rifle Range to the RA-Sub Committee from their current managing committees. These assets will be held as Corporate Assets on an interim basis until a long-term use is identified, at which point responsibility may be reassigned to a more appropriate committee.
20. Commission a series of feasibility studies from a range of external specialists, including architectural input from Hawkins Brown, who previously advised on the Tideway project, and skatepark design expertise from Betong Park Ltd. These studies will be funded from the approved £25,000 budget and will inform a comparative assessment of both commercial and community-led delivery options. The resulting multidisciplinary advice will be compiled into an initial feasibility report. The scope of this commission is outlined in Appendix 2.

21. Assess the site's potential for both commercial and community uses, including hybrid models, ensuring active stakeholder engagement throughout the process.
22. Present interim findings and recommendations to RASC in September 2025, with a full suite of options and detailed costings expected to follow in Q1 2026.

Strategic Fit

23. This initiative supports the City's Corporate Plan objectives:

Vibrant, Thriving Destination: Active and commercial uses will contribute to a dynamic riverside environment that serves residents, workers, and visitors.

Financial and Resource Implications

24. The £25,000 feasibility budget will be met from the City Surveyor's local risk allocation. Should a project go ahead this cost may be sought from the approved budget for the project.
25. Officer time will be required to manage legal discussions, coordinate technical input, and oversee feasibility work but this cost will be met from existing local risk budgets for these staff
26. Funding for any project, should Members decide to proceed, will need to be identified at that time, and based on the estimated project costs.

Conclusion

27. The undercroft and rifle range represent a rare opportunity to repurpose legacy infrastructure in a high-profile location. With legal clarity and strategic investment, these spaces could support a range of uses—from community sports to energy resilience and commercial activation. Members are asked to note the proposed next steps to ensure that future decisions are informed, deliverable, and aligned with the City's placemaking ambitions.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Site plan

Appendix 2 – Scope of work for Initial Feasibility Report

Tom Hodgkiss

Principal Surveyor

T: 07712 235 581

E: Thomas.hodgkiss@cityoflondon.gov.uk