

THINGS **MADE**  
**PUBLIC**

# CONSULTATION FINDINGS

City of London

# CONTENTS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary	03
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## AUDIENCE INSIGHTS & SURVEY

Introduction	08
Existing Analysis & Gaps	09
City of London Audience Insights	10
Public Survey: Our Approach	11
Who Responded	12
General Learnings	13
City Workers & Business Owners	14
City Residents	15
Visitors to the City	16
Key Takeaways	17

## FOCUS GROUPS

Focus Groups: Our Approach	20
Local Residents	21
City Workers	25
Young People & Families	29
Place, Leisure & Tourism	34
Global Exchange	39
Creative Enterprise & Industries	43
Culture	47
Heritage	51
Cultural Investors	55
Property Development	59

## ONE TO ONES

Who We Spoke To	65
Key Takeaways	66

## CREATIVE CONSULTATION

Creative Consultation: Our Approach	70
Street Level Storytelling	71
Creative Workshops	72
Key Takeaways	74

## CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Aligning With Emerging Themes	77
Conclusion	81
Next Steps	82

## APPENDICES

City of London Cultural Strategy: Survey Questions	84
City of London Cultural Strategy Survey: Distribution Channels	88

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# WHAT DID WE DO?

Between February and May 2025, we listened.

To residents who've lived in the Square Mile for decades. To workers finding moments of creativity between meetings. To parents, teenagers, teachers, small business owners, cultural leaders, global collaborators, and those simply passing through.

This report brings together everything we've heard so far. It builds on the earlier Research & Insight phase to share the views, voices and values of the people shaping the Cultural Strategy for the City of London.

We've heard hundreds of ideas – layered, diverse and sometimes in tension. But certain messages came through loud and clear.





# WHAT DID WE HEAR?

**People want culture that feels relevant to them – not just impressive from afar:** There's no shortage of ambition in the City. But across every group, people spoke about the need for cultural experiences that feel personal, relatable, and connected to their lives. Big institutions are respected – but they can feel distant. People want to feel part of the story, not just observers of it.

**People want to 'do':** Creatives, makers, community organisers, students and parents all spoke of wanting more space, more visibility and more opportunities to shape the City's cultural life. Culture isn't just something you go and see – it's something you do. And people want the chance to do it here.

**The Corporation's role is to enable, not control:** Communities and creators want ownership. They're asking for co-authorship, not consultation. People want permission to lead – and support that's generous, not gatekept.

**Make room for the bold, the messy and the new:** Many felt the City can be overly cautious, polished and risk-averse – leaving little room for experimentation or failure. There's a strong appetite for a cultural offer that's brave enough to try, fail and try again.

**Culture must feel safe, accessible and human:** Whether it's about affordability, physical access, inclusive environments or a sense of psychological safety, people want cultural spaces that are designed with care – not just creativity. Welcoming design matters as much as artistic ambition.

**Reframe heritage for today:** The Square Mile is full of extraordinary heritage. But people want stories that feel alive – not locked in the past, or told from a single perspective. From contested legacies and underrepresented voices to co-curated histories and bold reinterpretations of place, there's huge potential to tell the City's story in ways that are honest, relevant and resonant today.

**People want to celebrate what's already here:** The Square Mile is full of cultural life – but often it's hidden in plain sight. From grassroots groups and historic venues to lunchtime concerts and public art, there's a lot to be proud of. People don't just want new things – they want to value and elevate what's already working.

**Communication is still a major barrier:** Whilst resources such as the City Information Centre were praised, Again and again, we heard: "I just didn't know that was happening." People want simpler ways to find out what's on – and to feel like that information is

for them. Better communication could unlock a huge untapped audience already walking through the City every day.

**Culture should be visible in the everyday:** Across different groups, people talked about wanting to stumble across culture – not seek it out. Street-level experiences, open-access events, and unexpected creative moments in public spaces were seen as key to making the City feel alive and culturally welcoming.

**The rhythm of working life has changed – and culture needs to follow:** Workers told us: "We don't need big events. We need quick moments of magic." Pop-ups, lunchtime interventions, creative break spaces – these felt more relevant than formal, ticketed experiences.

**The weekend gap is real:** The City empties out after hours and at weekends – and it doesn't have to. There's a huge opportunity to rethink how public spaces are used across the full week, and to invite a more diverse audience into the City.

**The City's cultural identity feels unclear – even to those who love it:** Despite being home to world-leading institutions, many said the City's cultural offer feels fragmented or hard to define. But the potential is huge – and people want to see the City embrace its contradictions. Old and new. Serious and playful. Global and hyperlocal. It can be all of these at once.



## WHO DID WE SPEAK TO?

To begin, the Audience Agency reviewed 47 existing datasets, surveys and engagement reports to identify what we already knew – and where the gaps were. This gave us a strong foundation for meaningful conversations with people across the Square Mile and beyond.

From February to May 2025, we listened to:

- 178 participants through 10 bespoke focus groups
- 741 responses to a public survey
- 19 stakeholder conversations with cultural leaders, community groups, educators, business forums, and international collaborators

This consultation programme was designed and facilitated by Things Made Public, in partnership with the City of London Corporation.

This phase was about going deeper. Hearing directly from the people who live, work and spend time in the City – not just about what's working, but what's missing, and what could be possible.

This document shares those insights in detail. Each section focuses on a key audience group and presents what we heard in their own words – challenges, aspirations, and the kinds of cultural life they want to see take root and grow in the City.

There are no neat answers. But there is a clear direction.

Culture in the City of London isn't one thing. It's many voices, many stories, many possibilities.

This report is a record of that – and a foundation for what comes next.



# AUDIENCE INSIGHTS & SURVEY



# AUDIENCE INSIGHTS AND SURVEY INTRODUCTION



Culture in the City needs to respond to its audiences. The people who live and work in and around the City, the visitors who come here from around the world and those who would visit if the cultural offer and identity is right. This includes:

- 8,600 people who live in the City of London with 1.9m living in the surrounding 7 boroughs
- 678,000 people who work in the City of London
- Millions of domestic and international visitors per year including tourists and business visitors.

We are not starting from scratch. Much excellent work has been undertaken to understand who uses the City today, how culture plays a part in their experience of the City and what they would like to see in the future.

To ensure the Cultural Strategy builds upon this work, the Audience Agency was commissioned to review this evidence base of existing materials, including 47 documents containing audience insights and data from a range of City organisations from the period 2017-2024.

This has been supplemented by analysis of the ticketing data of City of London cultural institutions, compared against wider London cultural venues, to understand who is currently accessing the cultural offer of the City.

This analysis has informed a survey that seeks to address gaps in the current evidence base, understanding cultural engagement and preferences of people who live, work and visit the City.

The findings of this analysis can be found in the following chapter. These will inform further primary research that will focus on key gaps in our understanding, including those who are not currently coming to the City but could be.



# EXISTING ANALYSIS AND GAPS

## Introduction

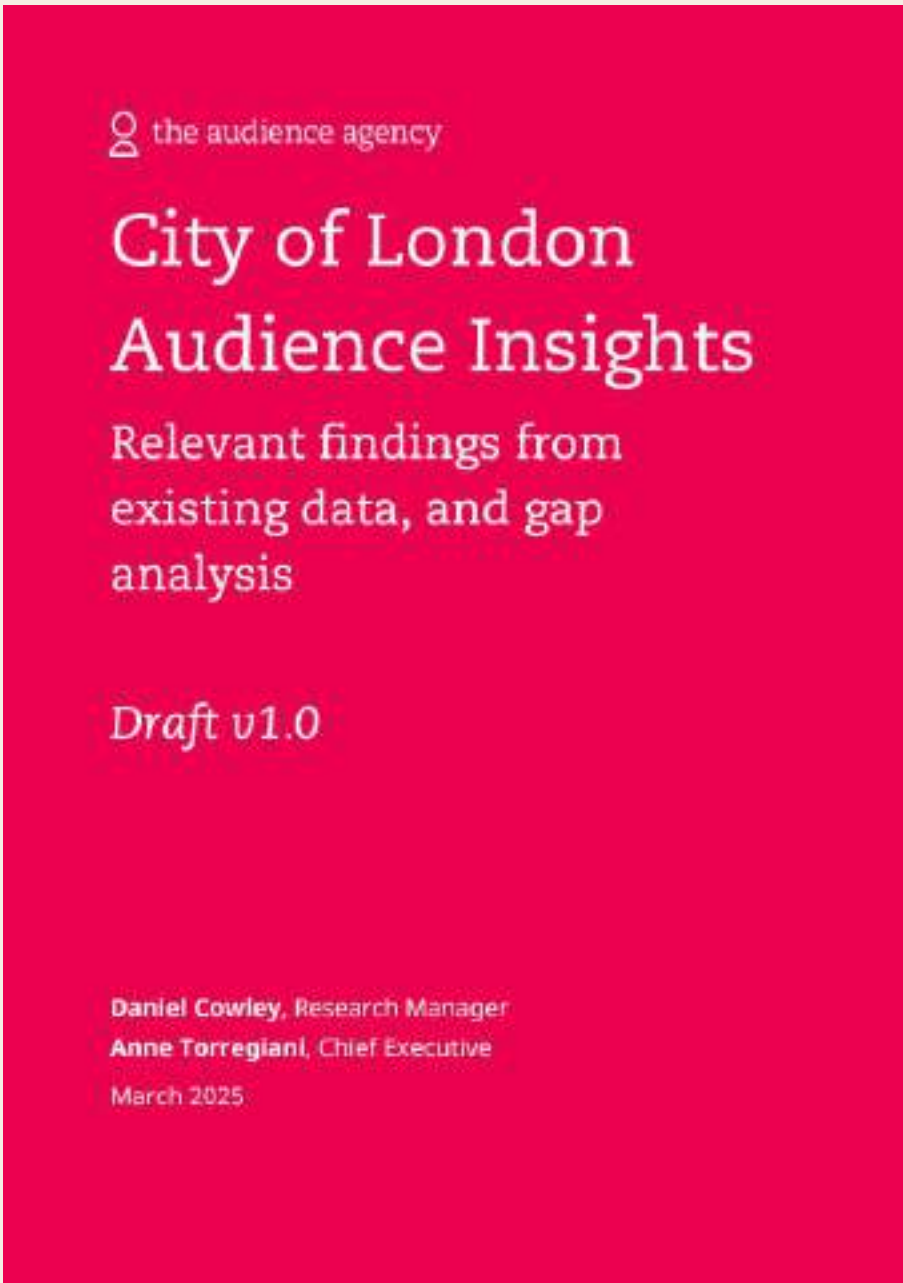
The approach to stakeholder engagement for the City of London Cultural Strategy has been informed by a review of existing data and gap analysis report by the Audience Agency. This analysed 47 documents containing audience insights and data from a range of City organisations from the period 2017-2024 to:

- Understand the breadth of existing research – in terms of population described, themes covered, quality, and relevance
- Add value where possible through deeper analysis
- Synthesise findings relevant to the Cultural Strategy
- Full findings and details of sources can be found within the City of London Audience Insights Report.

## Key Findings

- On average 62% of audiences for City Culture live in London, particularly Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Southwark and Islington. 23% live elsewhere in the UK and 12% live overseas.
- Cultural activity tended to rank below attending work meetings, exploring the area and meeting friends/family as motivations for leisure users coming to the City.
- People coming for cultural activity tended to emphasise experiencing something new/different; doing the ‘tourist trail’; and activities for children as their primary motivations for coming to the City.
- Prior knowledge, word of mouth and digital content were the most common sources of information about cultural events and organisations in the City, with promotional print being a source for just 7% of respondents. However, it this merely indicates how people heard about an event or activity, not their preferences for finding out information.
- Increasing events and attractions was identified as an opportunity for simultaneously increasing frequency and encouraging the less engaged to visit.

- The unique heritage offer was significantly more appealing to those who don’t work in the City (48% vs. 29% of City workers) and older Londoners (61% of those aged 55+).
- Expensive shops, too many tourists and lack of uniqueness were the most commonly identified barriers to people coming to the City.





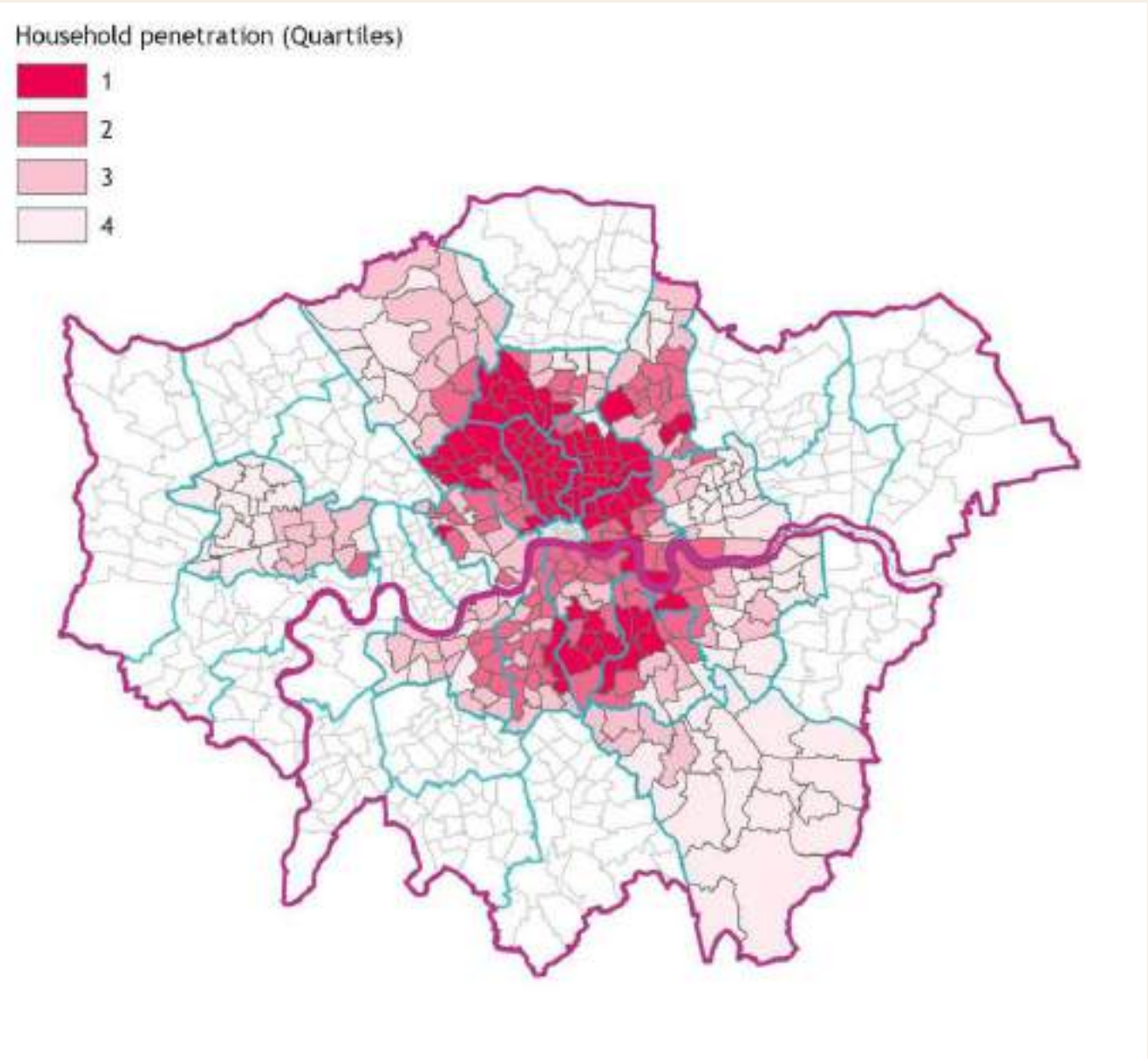
# CITY OF LONDON AUDIENCE INSIGHTS

The Audience Agency also conducted analysis of ticketing data of City of London organisations including the Barbican Centre, London Symphony Orchestra, Boy Blue Entertainment, Cheek By Jowl, The Museum of London and the Bishopsgate Institute. This data was compared against 72 other London organisations to understand particular characteristics of City of London venue audiences.

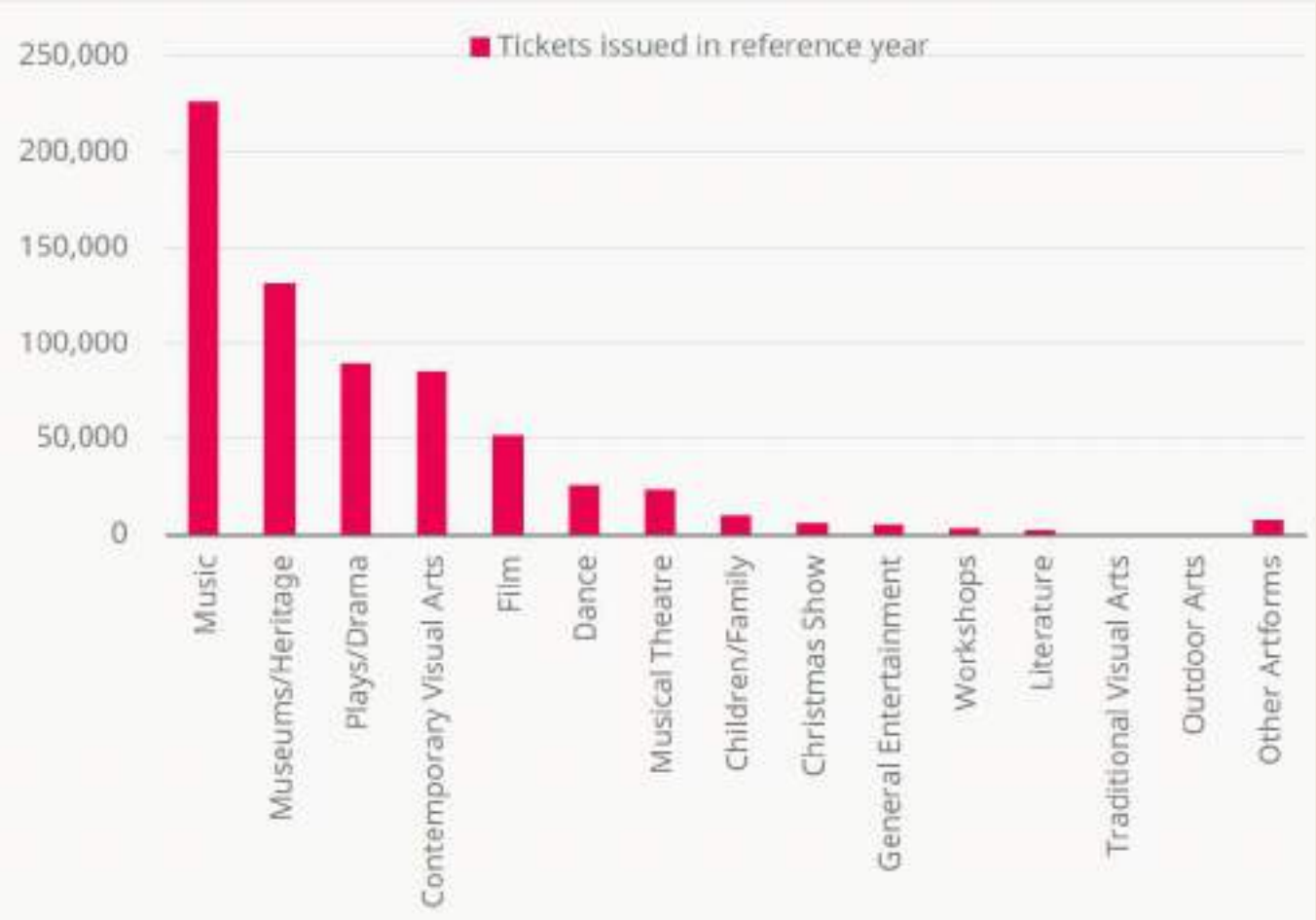
## Key Findings

- The most prominent artforms in terms of tickets issued were Music, Museums/Heritage, Plays/Drama, and Contemporary Visual Arts.
- Overall, around three quarters of bookers at City venues booked once in a two-year period from January 2022, and a quarter booked more than once in this period, suggesting a relatively strong level of repeat visits.
- Hackney, Islington, Tower Hamlets, Southwark, Camden, and Lambeth account for a total of 25% of bookers.

- Compared with the profile of people living in these areas, highly engaged audiences are significantly over-represented in City of London venues whilst lower engaged audiences are significantly under-represented.
- There is potential for growing the City’s audiences living in West London, particularly parts of Westminster and Wandsworth.
- Audiences cross-over with several other central London venues including Southbank Centre, Sadler’s Wells, Bridge Theatre, Shakespeare’s Globe and Soho Theatre.
- People who book tickets at City venues tend to also buy tickets in other parts of London with main artforms being Music (28%), Plays/Drama (25%), Contemporary Visual Arts (23%), and Dance (17%).



Wards in London with highest market penetration of CoL venue bookers



Tickets sold for different cultural forms in CoL venues



# PUBLIC SURVEY OUR APPROACH

The City of London Cultural Strategy Survey was a short online survey with additional responses collected via physical copies distributed at City of London venues. It asked 13 Questions providing quantitative and qualitative details of respondents' demographics; affiliation to the City; current levels of engagement in cultural activity in the City; feelings about the current City identity and cultural offer; and preferences for future cultural activity.

The full list of questions can be found in the appendices. The survey includes several standardised questions that align with the DCMS Participation Survey, allowing for cross-referencing with larger datasets and benchmarking against other locations.

The survey aimed to reach a wide range of audiences including people who currently visit or engage with City of London cultural venues; City residents; people who work in the City; people with broader connections with the City; and people who visit the City. Distribution was through a range of channels that included mailing lists, social media, newsletters, direct email contacts and physical copies at key locations of the City of London Corporation; City Corporation community and cultural venues; resident groups; business forums; tourism communications channels; and through direct sharing of stakeholders involved in the Cultural Strategy focus groups.

A full list of ways and locations the survey was shared can be found in the appendices.

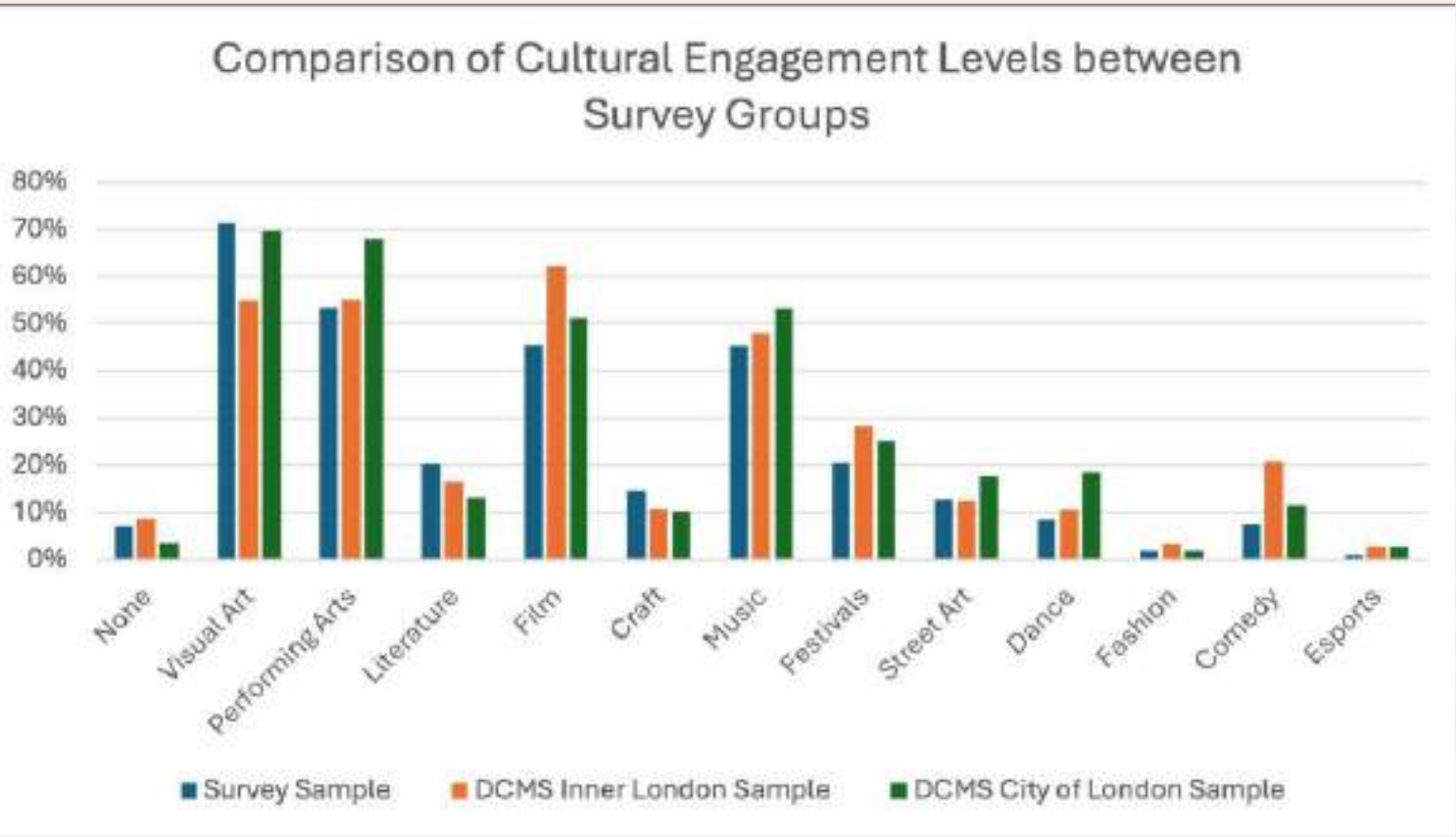
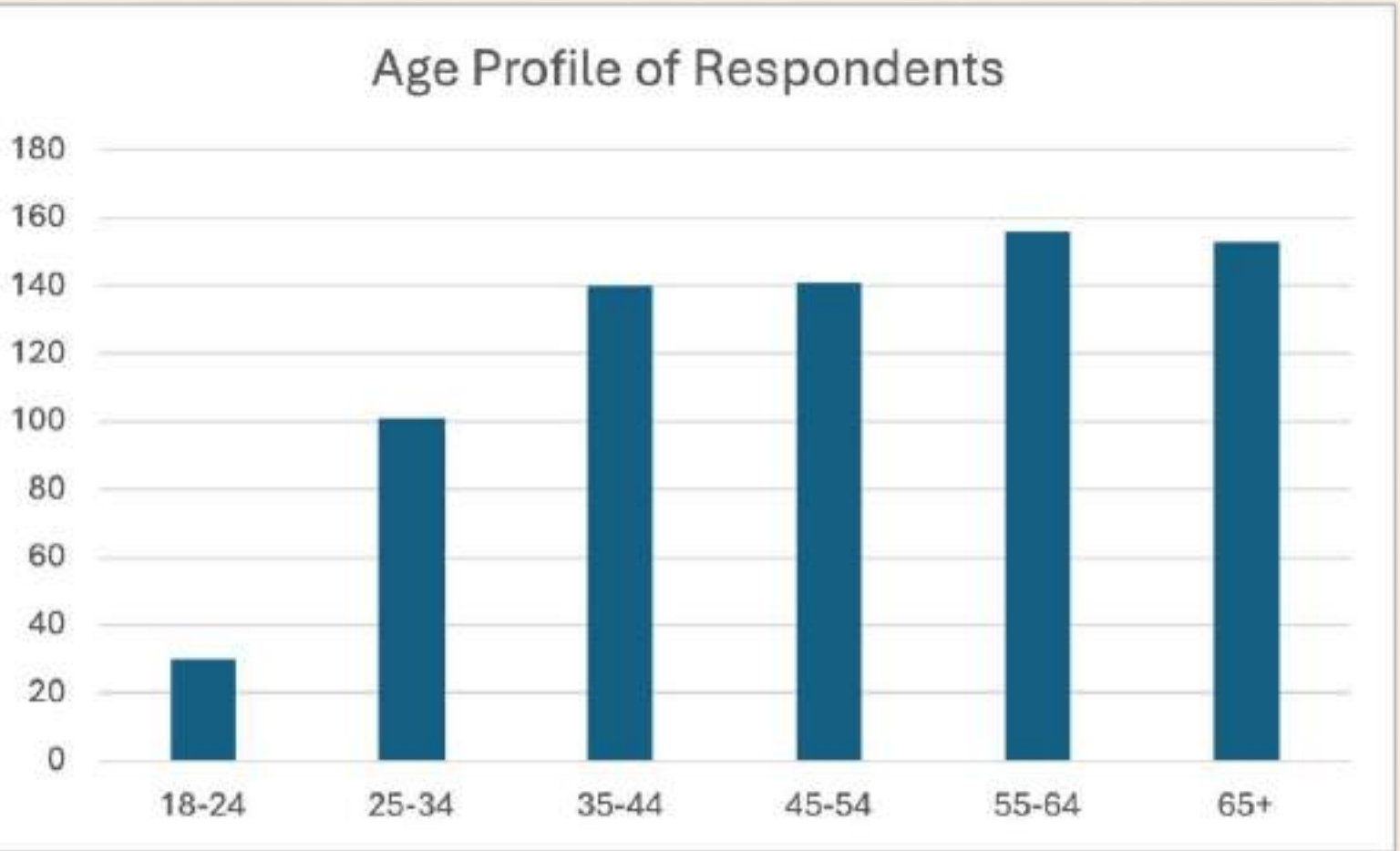
# WHO RESPONDED?

**741 responses** were received, well above the 384 sample size required for a 95% confidence level for the population group of 685,000 city workers and residents. This includes:

- **City Affiliation:** 372 City workers or business owners; 233 City Residents and 115 Visitors, with 18 not stated.
- **Age Range:** The age distribution can be seen on the chart opposite. Representation of under 24s was low with only 31 responses, however all other age groups had at least 100 responses providing a good sample size for individual age groups.
- **Gender:** 63% Female / 33% Male / 1.2% non-binary and 2% not specifying, indicating a skew towards female respondents overall.
- **Ethnicity:** 82% White, 5.5% Asian/British Asian, 5.4% Mixed or Multiple, 3.9% Black/Black British and 3.9% Other. Sample groups for detailed ethnicity subgroups were not sufficient to draw confident insights.

- **Representative of Cultural Attitudes:** The sample group was broadly representative in terms of cultural tastes and levels of engagement when compared with the larger DCMS Participation Survey 2023/24, with a slight lean towards visual arts and literature compared with performing arts, comedy and dance.

Overall, this suggests we can have a **high level of confidence** in the survey results as an **accurate representation of cultural tastes** and attitudes of **City Workers and Residents** in particular, **including subdivisions** of these groups by age, gender and broad ethnic groups.





# GENERAL LEARNINGS

**Frequency of Engagement** – 55% engaged in cultural activity in the City at least once per month suggesting high frequency of engagement. Resident engagement was particularly high with 47% engaging in activities on a weekly basis. City workers (66.8%) and domestic visitors (76.6%) were more likely to engage monthly or just a few times per year.

**What Culture People Experience in the City** – Exhibitions (71% of respondents), Theatre/Ballet/Opera (53%), Film (46%) and Live Music (45%) were the most common artforms people said they access in the City. This aligns with findings from the Audience Agency review and analysis of ticketing data.

**What Culture People Want More Of** – Live Music (53%), Exhibitions (50%), Theatre/Ballet/Opera (48%), Arts Festivals (45%) and Literature Events (35%) were

the most common artforms requested. The focus on live music was reflected in previous surveys of audiences highlighted in the Audience Agency report.

**Key Gaps in Provision** – A comparison between the cultural activities people said they access in the City and the activities they'd like to see suggests the biggest gaps in current provision are live music, street art events, comedy and fashion events.

**Barriers to Access** – Lack of awareness (51%), Timing (45%) and Cost (36%) were the most common stated barriers to engaging in culture in the City. City workers were more likely to state timing as a main barrier (52%). City residents are more likely to state relevance as the main barrier (26%) which is surprising given residents show the highest frequency of current engagement.

**Importance of Culture** – 57% of respondents agreed culture is very important to the identity of the City with residents being the most to state this (62%). Notably 52% also agreed culture is very important to the economic future of the City including 50% of City workers and business owners.

**Identity of the City** – Words associated with the City reflected a strong lean towards history, heritage and tradition. Terms like corporate, business and finance highlight the central role of commerce to the City's identity. Barbican was a common response emphasising its central cultural role. Common negative associations included expensive/elitist/exclusive; confused/unclear; dull/boring/staid; and hidden. More positive terms included diverse/varied; rich; interesting; and vibrant.

# LEARNINGS

## CITY WORKERS & BUSINESS OWNERS

**Young Workers (aged 18-44)** stated being **more culturally engaged**, with 45% accessing culture at least once a week. They said they engage more in activities like **live music** (40%), **cinema** (39%), **craft exhibitions** (17%), **comedy events** (13%), and **esports** (5%) than older workers. They also were **more actively creative**, participating in visual arts (58%), craft (43%), photography (43%), creative writing (23%) and film/animation (14%). Compared with older workers they **wanted more live music** (62%), **arts festivals** (54%), **film** (40%), **comedy** (30%), **fashion shows** (17%) and **esports** (9%). **Lack of awareness** (66%) and **cost** (55%) were much more likely to be barriers to them engaging in cultural activity.

**Older Workers (aged 45-64)** stated **more occasional engagement**, with 56% accessing

culture in the City a few times a year or rarely. Stated **engagement swayed more to exhibitions** (64%), **theatre** (42%), **public art** (16%) and **dance** (8%). This is reflected in the traditional cultural forms they wanted to see more of, including a focus on **heritage**. **Timing** (55%) was far more likely to be a barrier to their cultural engagement.

**Female Workers** - There were **no significant differences in overall levels of engagement** between male and female workers. Women were more likely to attend **theatre** (56%), **cinema** (49%), **literature** (23%), **craft** (16%) and **dance** events (9%) than men. This was reflected in a stronger desire to see more of these cultural events as well as **fashion shows** (15%).

More **BAME Workers** said they **engage rarely or never** (24%) than white workers. Compared with white workers, they said they access **arts festivals** (40%), **literature events** (30%), and **public art** (20%) with far **lower levels of engagement** in **theatre**, **cinema** and **craft**. They were more likely to **want more fashion events** (24%), **dance** (36%) and **literature** (42%) than white workers. **Cost** (39%), **relevance** (20%) and **accessibility** (15%) were more likely to be barriers to accessing culture.



# LEARNINGS CITY RESIDENTS

**Older residents (65+)** were **highly engaged** with 86% stating they access culture in the City at least monthly. The cultural activities they said they access tend to be more **traditional forms** including cinema (83%), exhibitions (82%), theatre (75%) and music (71%) whilst engaging much less in arts festivals (12%) and comedy (1%). They were much **less likely to actively participate in creative activities** themselves compared to younger residents. Surprisingly, given their high levels of cultural engagement, they were more likely to state **relevance** (30%) as a **barrier to cultural participation**.

**Younger residents (under 34)** were a fairly **small sample group** (27). Those who responded

were mainly **highly culturally engaged**, accessing culture on a weekly basis in the City (59%) and very likely to be **actively creative in visual arts** (71%), **craft** (43%) and **photography** (54%). They were the group with the highest stated levels of **engagement in arts festivals** (39%) and **comedy** (25%). They had the highest **desire to see more live music** (61%), **dance** (32%) and **fashion** (25%). **Cost** (68%), **lack of awareness** (61%) and **timing** (50%) were much more likely to be **barriers to their access**.

**Working age residents (35-64)** had **lower stated levels of engagement** in culture in the City, more limited to a few times a year or monthly engagement (56%). The variety of **cultural forms**

they said they access **broadly mirrored the average** responses, mixing traditional with wider forms of culture. They were **more likely to want to see more theatre** (57%), **literature** (43%), **live music** (52%) and **comedy** (22%) than other groups.

**BAME residents** had **slightly lower levels of engagement** than white residents although **76% still stated engaging at least monthly**. Engagement in **cinema** (69%), **live music** (60%) and **comedy** (14%) were higher than average. BAME residents showed a much **higher desire to see festivals** (45%), **dance** (29%) and **fashion shows** (21%). **Cost** was a much more **significant barrier to accessing culture** (64%) than for other audience groups.

# LEARNINGS VISITORS TO THE CITY

- **What kinds of visitors responded** – Of the 115 visitor responses 52% were from other parts of London, 37% were from outside London and 10% were from outside the UK. Most were aged 35-64 (62%) and female (72%).
- **Culture they experience in the City** – **Exhibitions** (67%) and **Theatre** (40%) as well as museums and heritage were the **most common cultural forms** they currently access, with levels engaging in **live music** (28%), **cinema** (23%) and **public art** (10%) were **significantly lower** compared with residents and workers.
- **What they would like to see** – Visitors also **wanted to see more exhibitions** (58%), **arts festivals** (45%) and **craft exhibitions** (30%) with **less emphasis on live music, dance and comedy** than other respondents. Younger visitors (under 34) were more likely to want to see arts festivals in the City.
- **Barriers to participation** – **Lack of awareness** (57%) was a much more common barrier to engaging the culture in the City than for other groups and was **particularly stark for 18-34 visitors** (81%). Younger visitors were also more likely to see **cost** (52%) and **relevance** (22%) as barriers to engagement.
- **What visitors think of the City** – External visitors were the most likely to associate the City with **history, heritage, architecture and tradition**. They also had the **most positive associations** with the City's identity with words like **diverse, rich, interesting, vibrant, innovative** and **unique** being used. The most common **negative words** used to describe the City identity included **expensive** and **inaccessible**



# WHAT THIS TELLS US: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## CULTURE MATTERS

Across workers, residents and visitors it is clear that people in the City place a high value on culture in their lives and sense of identity. This is reflected in the Audience Agency profiles of these groups, the importance they see in culture for the identity and economic future of the City, and the high frequency of engagement they have in cultural activity, which is well above national averages.

## TAPESTRY OF AUDIENCES

Despite being united by a high interest in culture, there is no single audience type for culture in the City. From the older resident who loves the big cultural institutions of the City; to the visitor who engages with its rich heritage and traditions; to the young worker who wants buzz and sociability in City life. Some of the expectations and assumptions of these groups are contradictory. So the cultural identity of the City needs to be fluid enough to allow it to be many things for many people.

## GENERATIONAL SHIFTS

Age appears to be a defining factor of cultural attitudes within City audiences, regardless of if they are residents, workers or visitors. The City's younger audiences are looking for a broader kind of cultural offer, encompassing comedy, fashion and festivals. They are generally more actively creative themselves and may be attracted to more participatory activity. It will be important to ensure the City's cultural offer evolves to cater for these shifting tastes, whilst not alienating older audience groups that currently make up a majority of City audiences.

# WHAT THIS TELLS US: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## COMMUNICATING WITH AUDIENCES

Whilst there are practical barriers of cost and timing to consider, ultimately the main barrier audiences appear to face is knowing what is going on. Analysis of prior surveys indicates that few audiences are getting their information from traditional print sources, instead relying more on prior knowledge of organisations, word of mouth or digital sources. As such building familiarity and loyalty over time appears to be key, not relying on one-off marketing pushes.

## BROADENING DEFINITIONS OF CULTURE

There appears to be a desire for greater diversity in the cultural offer in general. Desires for comedy, fashion, literature events, esports and street art sit alongside traditional formats of exhibitions, performing arts and heritage. Greater understanding of the kinds of live music people want to see and where they want to see it is needed, as this remains the most popular request across demographics. Achieving this can combat the more negative perceptions some have of the City as dull, boring and staid.

## CULTURAL CREATORS NOT JUST CONSUMERS

There is a younger wave of workers and residents in the City that appear to be highly creative. They do visual arts and craft activities, they write, take photographs and make videos. Tapping into this latent creativity can enhance the cultural life of the City and give it distinctiveness without always needing to 'put on' culture or buy it in.



# FOCUS GROUPS

# FOCUS GROUPS

## OUR APPROACH



Alongside survey responses and one-to-one conversations, a series of focus groups gave us the chance to listen to people in real time and in their own words.

In April 2025, we held ten group workshops with different communities connected to the City: residents, workers, families, business leaders, cultural organisations and more. Each session focused on a set of core questions, tailored to the group.

These weren't workshops with fixed outcomes. They were open discussions, designed to surface honest reflections, everyday experiences and practical ideas.

Each section that follows focuses on one group. The key takeaways and quotes are taken directly from participants and the live scribe illustrations show a picture of the conversations in real time. The key messages reflect the themes that came through most clearly.



# LOCAL RESIDENTS







## KEY QUESTIONS

**#1** What does culture mean to you?

**#2** What cultural activities and spaces do you enjoy doing or visiting? Why?

**#3** What prevents you from enjoying cultural activities or places? How can the City's cultural offer be made more welcoming and accessible to residents?

**#4** What cultural activities or spaces would you like to see in the City in the future?

## ATTENDEES

- **Middlesex Street Residents Association /Petticoat Square Leaseholders' Association** | Roger Way
- **Barbican Association** | Jan-Marc Petroschka
- **Tudor Rose Court** | Iain Meek
- **Lauderdale Tower** | Ruth Steele
- **Journalist and blogger** | David Wilcox
- **COLAG** | Amanda Jacobs
- **COLAG** | Terry Trickett
- **Shoreditch Trust** | Kati Martin
- **Age UK City of London** | Alice Westlake
- **Artizan St Library and Community Centre** | Claire Doolan
- **Portsoken and Golden Lane Community Centre** | Stephanie McDonald
- **Urban Symbiotics** | Stephanie Edwards
- **Hoxton Hall** | Grace Hammonds
- **CoL Equalities Director** | Sarah Guerra
- **CoL Head of Barbican and Community Libraries** | Rachel Levy
- **CoL Resident Campaigns and Communications** | Emily Grant
- **CoL Head of Housing Management** | Liam Gillespie
- **CoL City Welcome and Customer Experience Manager** | Inma Ferrer







# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## CULTURE MUST BE DESIGNED FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PEOPLE, NOT JUST INSTITUTIONS AND ARTEFACTS

Residents believe that cultural strategies should grow from the ground up, driven by the lived experiences of people rather than top-down decisions from powerful institutions. Too often, cultural plans reflect institutional perspectives more than community voices.

*“I’m just making a plea for the cultural strategy to be designed from the point of view of people and not just institutions and artefacts.”*

## THE CITY NEEDS TO TAKE RISKS AND STOP TRYING TO BE SO PERFECT

Residents feel that the City’s approach to culture can be too controlled and cautious, stifling organic and grassroots growth. The desire to keep things neat and orderly means that vibrant, spontaneous cultural expressions often get pushed aside.

*“The City is obsessed with being really, like, perfect. Everything has to be tied up... We’re actively designing out grassroots culture.”*

## COMMUNICATION BARRIERS ARE PREVENTING ACCESS TO CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

One of the biggest challenges residents identified was the lack of clear, consistent communication about what’s happening culturally. Many felt they were missing out simply because information wasn’t easy to find or access. Libraries used to be a reliable hub for local news, but that role has faded.

*“It’s actually knowing what’s going on... It’s just not quite being totally sure that you’re not missing out on something.”*

## ACCESSIBILITY MUST BE AT THE HEART OF CULTURAL PLANNING

Residents were clear that accessibility is still an afterthought in many cultural projects. Whether it’s physical access, financial barriers, or sensory-friendly environments, too many spaces still feel exclusive rather than welcoming.

*“The creative vision is more important than accessibility and inclusion, which I think is frankly, a really despicable approach.”*



# CITY WORKERS







## KEY QUESTIONS

**#1** What does culture mean to you?

**#2** What cultural activities and spaces do you enjoy doing or visiting? Why?

**#3** How can culture be integrated into the work day, after work and at weekends?

**#4** What cultural activities or spaces would you like to see in the City in the future?

## ATTENDEES

- **Savills** | Aretha Ahunanya
- **Savills** | Gina Lewis
- **CoL Social Mobility Network** | Katherine Pearce
- **CoL Young Employees Network** | Thomas Wrench
- **CoL Young Employees Network** | Oscar Dixon
- **CoL Women's Inclusivity Network** | Jane Trask
- **CoL Women's Inclusivity Network** | Emily Garland
- **CoL City Pride** | Leah Woodlock
- **CoL Disability, Ability and Wellbeing Network** | Tabitha Swann
- **CoL CLEAR Network** | Nadia Khalaf
- **CoL CLEAR Network** | Vijeshrie Vaghela (Jes)
- **City Women Network** | Rhonda Martin
- **Bidvest Noonan** | Donovan Fonnies
- **St James** | Elena Quintero Velasco
- **Brookfield Properties** | Merie King
- **Generation Success** | James Adeleke
- **Dragon Café in the City** | Christine Harwood
- **Culture Mile BID** | Andrew Smith
- **City Information Centre** | Maria Garcia-Yuste







# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## THE CITY NEEDS A HOLISTIC CULTURAL OFFER THAT FITS MODERN WORKING LIFE

City workers want a cultural offer that feels fresh, flexible, and part of their everyday routines. They want shorter, varied activities that don't take up a whole evening, along with more chances to socialise and enjoy food as part of cultural engagement.

*“We need more things that don't take up the whole evening... just a quick bite, something social, something interesting that doesn't feel like a big commitment.”*

## POP-UPS AND STREET PERFORMANCES CAN TRANSFORM THE CITY'S ATMOSPHERE

Temporary, spontaneous cultural interventions like pop-ups and street performances can really change the vibe of the City. People loved the idea of these short, unplanned cultural moments that make the everyday feel a bit more exciting and create chances to connect.

*“Pop-up food stalls and a bit of live music... it just makes the place feel more alive.”*

## COMMUNICATION IS KEY TO CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

City workers often feel out of the loop when it comes to knowing what's on. Information about cultural events isn't easy to find, and people regularly miss out because they hear about things after they've happened. There's a real need for a simple, central way to find out what's going on.

*“It's hard to know what's going on... you hear about something after it's happened, and it's frustrating.”*

## TIMING MATTERS – AND NEEDS TO BE FLEXIBLE

Getting the timing right is crucial, but it's not as simple as picking one time slot that works for everyone. Workers have different schedules, and what's convenient for one group might not suit another. Some prefer quick lunchtime activities, while others look for something later after work.

*“There's no point putting something on at 6pm if people are still working... but equally, not everyone wants to commit to a whole evening event.”*

## WELLBEING AND SOCIAL CONNECTION ARE ESSENTIAL

Workers really value spaces and activities that let them switch off, relax, and connect – places that don't feel corporate. Whether it's live music & a bite with friends or a green meditative spot away from the hustle and bustle, the aim is to feel more human and less like they're in the office.

*“Sometimes you just need a place to recharge... somewhere that doesn't feel corporate.”*



# YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES







## KEY QUESTIONS

**#1** What does culture mean to you?

**#2** What cultural activities and spaces do you enjoy doing or visiting? Why?

**#3** What prevents you from enjoying cultural activities or places? How can the City's cultural offer be made more welcoming and accessible to young people and families?

**#4** Can the City's culture offer help to make jobs in the Square Mile more accessible and inclusive for young people? How?

## ATTENDEES

- **City Family Arts Network** | Lala Thorpe
- **Carers and Parents Network** | Alastair Wainwright
- **UCL - East Bank** | Tasmin Ace
- **City of London Academies Trust** | Diana Nathan
- **Northeastern University** | Catherine Brown
- **Campaign for Learning (National)** | Miranda Baxter
- **London Museum** | Laura Thompson Turnage
- **CoL London Careers Festival** | Jamie Hannon
- **A New Direction** | Steve Moffitt
- **Family Centre at Aldgate School** | Zahida Hussain
- **St Lukes Community Centre** | Carol-Ann McCardle
- **Urban Learners** | Venetia Wolfenden
- **CoL Culture** | Tanya Dean
- **CoL Culture** | Alice Spalding



What does 'Culture' mean to you?

...A sense of **BELONGING**...

...Culture is **ALWAYS CHANGING**...

How might we address the challenges...

1. Scooter trail around the city... **SAFE, SIGHT SEEING**...

...A shared Understanding that can **UNITE OR DIVIDE**...

It's how we **LIVE OUR LIVES**... It's how we bring **PEOPLE TOGETHER**...

Work WITH FAMILIES...

GROUP ACTIVITIES

is culture being more **POLITICIZED?**

What do we know about cultural activities?

...Kids can get **LOST** at a **YOUNG AGE**...

...There is a **GAP in PROVISIONS** for Adolescence...

...Feel like the **CITY is FOR US**...

**ENGAGE**

3. ...Show Projections of the Future from the past. To show how wrong they can be...

4.

...closed Street Party: Inter-generational Opportunities with local Business...

Children's **SCHOOL TRIPS** (usually how children first Engage with the City)...

**ACTION.**

...Universities are going to change the Environment...

Playgrounds, parks, Water...

Space for **CHILDREN** to **RUN + PLAY**...

...Involve **FAMILIES & CARE-GIVERS**

Rise the **HERITAGE** in Shaping Cultural Activities... Above the Towers.

# YOUNG PEOPLE & FAMILIES





# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## SUPPORTING THE JOURNEY FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADULTHOOD THROUGH CULTURE

Participants talked about how important it is to think about the whole journey of a young person in relation to the City. It's not just about offering activities for little kids – it's about making sure there are opportunities all the way through to young adulthood.

Culture should support personal growth, build skills, and connect young people to future job opportunities.

*“We don’t want to just focus on children, we want to think about that journey all the way through to older young people who are then looking for creative careers.”*

## MAKING CULTURE ACCESSIBLE, SAFE, AND WELCOMING

Families want cultural spaces that feel practical, welcoming, and safe. It's not enough to have brilliant events – they need to be easy to get to, affordable, and designed with families in mind. Travel costs, limited facilities, and the need for flexible timings can make even great activities feel out of reach.

*“If it’s too much of a hassle to get there or too expensive, people just won’t come.”*

## BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND AWARENESS TO ACCESS CULTURE

Sometimes, families just don't know what's out there – or if they do, it can still feel like it's not really for them. Building confidence to engage with culture means breaking down those barriers, making the offer clear, and showing that cultural spaces really are for everyone.

*“Families often don’t know what’s available – and even if they do, they might feel like it’s not really for them.”*



# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## EMBEDDING CULTURE INTO EVERYDAY SPACES

Culture doesn't always have to be something you go to – sometimes it should come to you. Families love seeing creative moments pop up in places they already spend time – whether that's a park, a school, or a community centre. Making culture part of the everyday makes it feel natural and inviting.

*“Meet families where they are – don't expect them to go out of their way to find culture.”*

## INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN SHAPING THE CULTURAL OFFER

Young people know what they want – but too often they're not asked. Giving them a real voice in planning cultural activities means the offer will feel more relevant, exciting, and meaningful. It's all about putting young people in the driving seat when it comes to shaping culture.

*“It's got to be driven by young people themselves – they know what they want.”*

## SOCIAL, GROUP ACTIVITIES BUILD CONFIDENCE AND CONNECTION

Cultural activities that bring people together – whether it's through workshops, performances, or creative projects – make the experience more enjoyable and less intimidating. There's a sense that doing things as a group helps people feel more comfortable and part of something bigger.

*“If you're on your own travelling, that could throw you and think, I'm never going to do that again. But as we did it as a group, we were able to follow through.”*



# PLACE, LEISURE & TOURISM







## KEY QUESTIONS

**#1** How can culture help to enhance and shape the City of London's wider visitor and tourism offer?

**#2** How can culture help shift the perception of the City as solely a business district?

**#3** How can different organisations better work together to develop programmes and campaigns that showcase the City's cultural offer for visitors?

**#4** How should the City better connect and communicate with a visitor audience?

## ATTENDEES

- **CoL Destination City** | Ben Dixon
- **CoL Planning** | Rob McNicol
- **CoL Corporate Strategy and Performance** | Lisa Ward
- **Eastern City BID** | Kate Hart
- **Fleet Street Quarter BID** | Lady Lucy French
- **Culture Mile BID** | Caroline Hanson
- **Aldgate Connect/Cheapside Business Alliance** | Zoe Barwick
- **Eastcheap Records** | Tom Jackman
- **Fabric** | Cameron Leslie
- **London and Partners** | Simon McCaugherty
- **Central London Alliance** | Nadia Perrier
- **Rosslyn** | James Hennebry
- **1 Lombard St** | Soren Jessen
- **1 Lombard St** | Elliot Hill
- **Andaz London** | Jad Lian
- **Hilton Group** | Peadar McFadden
- **Coverdale Barclay** | Katie Balcombe
- **Coverdale Barclay** | Hannah Channing
- **40 Leadenhall** | Ellie Green
- **Devonshire Square** | Patrizia Sechi
- **CoL Culture** | Andrew Lane
- **CoL Culture** | Mena Fitzgibbon
- **CoL Culture** | Inma Ferrer



What does Culture mean to you?

...A moment or a PLACE...

...Food & Drink...

Fantastic Opportunity to absorb from NEIGHBOURING BOROUGHs...

1 ... Attract Weekend Stay Audiences...

Curated Package of EXPERIENCES

2 ... Commercial Partnerships...

Things to draw Weekend Tourists in...

3 ... Literary Festivals to draw People in...

Different Activities for Different Ages...

4

Diversify our offering...

MARKETING

Infrastructure for Businesses

5 ... Bring Vendors & Venues together...

GEN Z - Want to see it first...

# PLACE, LEISURE & TOURISM

...has become quite FAR-REACHING...

What are our cultural assets?

... Outernet...

Great SUCCESS

... Easter Egg Trails...

... Frameless...

... A part of Culture is PARTICIPATION

create the space to create content...

... CULTURAL ACTIVATION as a must-see...  
→ Rockefeller tree et.c...

Barrier: Access to Toilets...

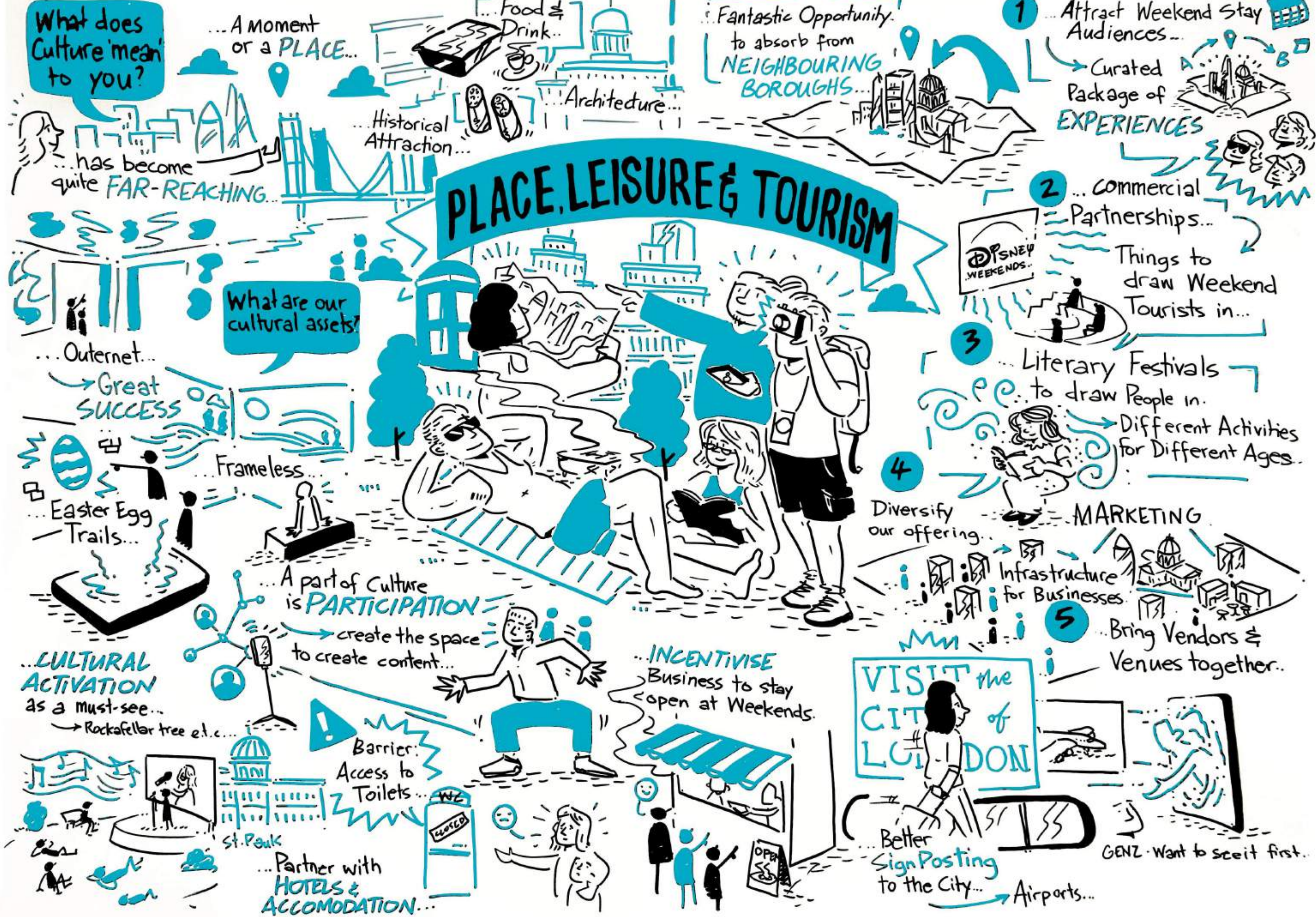
... Partner with HOTELS & ACCOMODATION...

... INCENTIVISE Business to stay open at Weekends.

VISIT the CITY of LONDON

... Better Sign Posting to the City...

Airports...





# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## TRANSFORMING THE CITY INTO A SEVEN-DAY DESTINATION

Participants highlighted the need for the City to be vibrant and welcoming beyond the traditional working week. While weekdays are often bustling, weekends feel empty and underutilised. The aim is to develop a seven-day offer that encourages people to visit, stay, and spend time exploring the City beyond office hours.

*“We want to see the City become a seven-day destination, not just a weekday office hub.”*

## CREATING A SENSE OF PLACE THROUGH POP-UPS AND STREET CULTURE

Participants expressed enthusiasm for the idea of pop-up events and street performances to create a more dynamic atmosphere. These spontaneous, temporary interventions were seen as a way to break the City’s often corporate feel and make it feel more lively, human, and accessible.

*“I love stumbling upon things when visiting places. Street culture really brings a city to life”*

## MAKING CULTURE PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Rather than seeing culture as a series of standalone events, participants called for it to be embedded into the daily experience of the City. This could include art installations in everyday spaces, cultural trails that lead people through key sites, and creative wayfinding that highlights the City’s rich history and contemporary stories.

*“People shouldn’t have to go looking for culture – it should be part of the City’s fabric.”*



# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## BUILDING A CLEAR IDENTITY FOR THE CITY'S CULTURAL OFFER

Participants noted that the City's cultural identity can feel fragmented and unclear. While it is home to world-class institutions like the Barbican Centre and historic landmarks, these elements don't always feel connected. There's a need for a cohesive narrative that celebrates the City's unique character.

*"We need to define what makes the City of London distinct – what makes it different from the West End."*

## EMBRACING ICONIC CULTURAL PROJECTS THAT DEFINE THE CITY

Participants were inspired by the idea of the City being home to cultural projects that no other place in the world could replicate. From the juxtaposition of iconic landmarks like St. Paul's with vibrant cultural venues like Fabric, the City has the potential to create cultural experiences that are uniquely bold and unforgettable.

*"The City should do things that no one else in the world can – like having Fabric and St. Paul's on your doorstep."*

## CELEBRATING HERITAGE IN A CONTEMPORARY WAY

Heritage is one of the City's most powerful assets, but it shouldn't feel static or stuck in the past. Participants felt that the City's history could be celebrated in ways that feel contemporary and engaging – from digital storytelling to creative interpretations that bring heritage to life for modern audiences.

*"We need to make the most of heritage without it feeling stuffy – keep it alive and relevant."*



# GLOBAL EXCHANGE







## KEY QUESTIONS

**#1** How can the City establish itself as an international hub for cultural exchange?

**#2** What role can digital culture play in making the City's cultural offer more globally accessible?

**#3** How can the Cultural Strategy help diversify the international audiences engaging with the City's culture?

**#4** How could the cultural offer take advantage of the City's global financial and professional services sector?

## ATTENDEES

- **Without Walls** | Ralph Kennedy
- **Without Walls** | Sophie Akbar
- **St Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation** | Clare Martin
- **Global Cultural Districts Network** | Natalie Vartapetova
- **Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the United Kingdom** | Hitoshi Ota
- **Guildhall Events** | Kieron Tilley
- **Shubbak: A Window on Contemporary Arab Culture** | Alia Alzoughbi
- **Dance Umbrella** | Freddie Opoku-Addaie
- **Barbican Immersive** | Patrick Moran
- **Art PerUK** | Katherine Tinoco
- **Guildhall School of Music and Drama** | Andy Lavender
- **British Council** | Rebecca Gould
- **CoL Guildhall Art Gallery** | Nancy Wade
- **CoL Culture** | Katie Whitbourn



What does 'Culture' mean to you?

...Broadening **CREATIVE HORIZONS**

...Use different **TOOLS** for all needs...

1 ...Want to be a known location for

**FESTIVALS**

**RETHINK**  
PARTNERSHIPS

**Culture** is everything you don't **NEED** to **LIVE**

# GLOBAL EXCHANGE

...take the **STORY** to the **STREETS**...



Make the Square Mile the **FESTIVAL MILE**...

→ Important to Reduce Bureaucracy for Artists...  
→ Celebration of Heritage

2

...Connecting **LOCAL** Artists with **INTERNATIONAL** Artists...



...Connect with **LARGER ORGANIZATION**

3

...Connecting & Reinvigorating **PUBLIC SPACES**

Joining the Dots...  
it is looking...

**BACK** and **FORWARD**

...you need **CULTURE** to survive...

...Reframing **PERCEPTIONS**

...Historic Preservation of **MONUMENTS**



'Tick box'

'Tokenistic'

'Tolerated'

...We Need to go beyond the

**3.T**

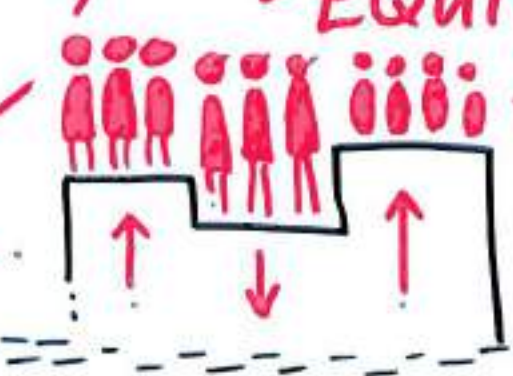


...Distribution of **OPPORTUNITIES**



...Redistribution of **Cultural Identity**...

**EQUITY**



...Want to avoid it just being a **TICK BOX EXERCISE**



...the **PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE** has changed in the City as a result of Development...

...Repurpose Spaces from **WORK** to **CULTURE**...



Where is the **CHAOS** in **culture**?

Make sure it doesn't **PUSH PEOPLE OUT**...



...have we become **OVER-PROFESSIONALISED**?

Make Access **AFFORDABLE!**





# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

EMBRACING THE CITY'S GLOBAL OPPORTUNITY WITHIN LONDON	TAKING CREATIVE RISKS WITH HONESTY	TRANSFORMING THE SQUARE MILE INTO A FESTIVAL SPACE	RECLAIMING STREETS AS VIBRANT CULTURAL SPACES	CREATING A SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SPACE IN A CHALLENGING WORLD
<p>Participants emphasised that the City of London is uniquely positioned to act as a global cultural connector, not just in isolation but as part of the wider capital city. The City's rich history, international connections, and status as a financial hub offer a unique opportunity to bridge local communities with global perspectives.</p>	<p>Participants discussed the importance of honesty and risk-taking in the City's cultural strategy. To genuinely connect on a global level, the City must be brave in how it tells its stories and engages with complex topics. Being transparent about its history and present realities allows for deeper, more meaningful cultural connections.</p>	<p>The concept of a "Square Mile of Festivals" emerged as a bold vision – where different cultures come alive in the streets through performances, pop-ups, and spontaneous events. The aim is to make the City feel more open, inviting, and internationally vibrant.</p>	<p>Participants saw an opportunity to make the most of the City's quieter weekends by closing roads and turning them into lively cultural hubs. Inspired by places like Trafalgar Square, the idea is to use road closures as a chance to transform public spaces into dynamic, people-focused areas that feel less corporate and more community-oriented.</p>	<p>Participants emphasised that the City of London should feel like a safe and welcoming space for everyone, especially given the global challenges people face today. Whether it's a place to express diverse identities or simply find a moment of calm, the City's cultural strategy should prioritise well-being, inclusion, and safety.</p>
<p><i>"What does it mean to be in London in a truly global city and City of London's place within that in relation to the other?"</i></p>	<p><i>"It's really about being honest with where we are right now and not just existing in the past."</i></p>	<p><i>"Imagine the Square Mile as a festival space – where different cultures come alive in the streets."</i></p>	<p><i>"Let's use the quiet weekends to do something amazing – close roads and create vibrant, people-first spaces."</i></p>	<p><i>"People need to feel safe to be themselves – especially when the world outside feels so uncertain."</i></p>



# CREATIVE ENTERPRISE & INDUSTRIES







## KEY QUESTIONS

**#1** How can the City of London become a place of opportunity for creative enterprises of all scales and a place that attracts creative talent?

**#2** How can the City of London present an opportunity for creative enterprise and attract creative talent?

**#3** What infrastructure and support do creative businesses need to thrive in the City?

**#4** How can creative industries collaborate more effectively with corporate sectors?

**#5** Is there a particular area of creative enterprise the City should drive forward the development of?

## ATTENDEES

- **CoL Small Business Research and Enterprise Centre** | Pat Das Bhaumik
- **New Diorama Theatre** | Jonathan Maydew-Gale
- **Theatre Deli** | David Ralf
- **Arts Admin** | Raidene Carter
- **Broadworks - Hive Curates** | Mark Beattie
- **Broadworks - Hive Curates** | Chantelle Purcell
- **Bompas & Parr** | Sam Bompas
- **Artichoke** | Helen Marriage
- **Babes in Development** | Leila George
- **Babes in Development** | Saffron King
- **London Metropolitan University, Aldgate Campus** | Jen Ng
- **CoL Culture** | Ruby Baker
- **CoL City Information Centre** | Amelia Hockey



What does 'Creative Enterprise' mean to you?

...Enterprise

The City of London is the **FOURTH** biggest funder of Arts in the **UK**

creatures: Natural Storytellers...

...Innovation...

...Creativity & Commerce...

...Create MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES...

...Who should tell this story?

...Entrepreneurship...

...ACCESS to OPPORTUNITIES...

# CREATIVE ENTERPRISE

canary Wharf: GOOD EXAMPLE  
→ Culture Plan in Action...

There is a difference between being an **ARTIST** & A **CREATIVE**

Especially in London...



7 Inter-disciplinary Arts Space

OPPORTUNITY  
...Taking over Empty Office Blocks...

What are some of the Barriers?

2 ...Go out to People

ENTRY-LEVEL SALARIES:  
→ Hard to access the city on a junior salary...

Getting People to RETURN to LONDON...

3 ...Create PARTNERSHIPS between Creativity + Commerce...

COST  
SALARY

FREE ART

has more to OFFER...

Need a more connected View of the City...

LELEBRATE BAD IDEAS

...How to break down 'BUSINESS'!

...Help NURTURE Young Creatives...

CLOSING PARTY

Two NIGHTS

TONIGHT ONLY



# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## CREATE DEMOCRATIC SPACE

Participants expressed the need for a collaborative, democratic space within the City where creatives, corporates, and community members can come together to exchange ideas and build partnerships.

*“The City needs to provide that kind of democratic space where different partners, collaborators can actually come in and talk amongst themselves instead of people imposing from the top.”*

## PEOPLE JUST DON'T EXPECT TO FIND CULTURE HERE

Participants highlighted the perception gap between the City's rich cultural offer and the public's awareness of it. Despite major institutions like the Barbican, smaller cultural initiatives often go unnoticed. Participants suggested that culture needs to be more visible, spontaneous, and part of everyday life rather than confined to traditional venues.

*“Half the time they didn't notice there was anything even remotely like that in the first place.”*

## SUPPORT LONG-TERM, NOT ONE-OFF

Participants emphasised the importance of sustained investment and support for creative initiatives rather than sporadic, short-term funding. The consensus was that grassroots cultural projects need long-term nurturing to establish themselves, build audiences, and achieve sustainability.

*“It takes 10 to 20 years to grow grassroots into something sustainable – it's not just a one-off investment.”*

## VALUE CREATIVE RISK AND EXPERIMENTATION

Creativity thrives when there is room for experimentation and failure. Participants discussed the need for a cultural landscape that embraces bold ideas without penalising mistakes. There was a sense that the City's corporate culture can feel at odds with creative spontaneity, making it harder to take risks and innovate.

*“There should be a festival of bad ideas – where creativity isn't about perfection, but about trying, failing, and learning.”*

## A LACK OF ACCESSIBLE CREATIVE SPACE

Finding affordable, welcoming creative spaces in the City remains a challenge. Participants discussed how the City's high costs and formal atmosphere make it difficult for emerging creatives to find space to develop their practice. There was strong support for the idea of dedicated, subsidised creative hubs.

*“It's hard to find a place where creatives can just be – where they can experiment without pressure.”*



# CULTURE







## KEY QUESTIONS

**#1** How can cultural partners of all sizes come together to support a more holistic cultural offer and richer culture ecosystem across the City?

**#2** What should be the overarching vision for the City's cultural future? How can we tell that story?

**#3** How can cultural programming reflect the diverse communities in the city, and bring in new audiences?

**#4** How can the unique context of the Square Mile be harnessed to increase sustained investment in culture?

**#5** How can the Cultural Strategy support grassroots creativity alongside major institutions?

## ATTENDEES

- **Duckie** | Simon Casson
- **Thames Festival Trust** | Adrian Evans
- **Festival.Org** | Ellie Harris
- **East London Dance** | Kate Scanlan
- **Kunstraum** | Thomas Cuckle
- **New London Architecture** | Federico Ortiz
- **Wayward** | Tom Kendall
- **Intermission Youth Theatre** | Darren Raymond
- **Bishopsgate Institute** | Francesa Canty
- **Guildhall School of Music & Drama** | Sian Brittain
- **The Barbican Centre** | Oluwatoyin Odunsi
- **London Symphony Orchestra** | Stephanie Hutchinson
- **CoL Remembrance's** | Fiona Hoban
- **CoL Barbican and Community Libraries** | Natalie Laccohee
- **CoL Guildhall Art Gallery** | Jenny Gonzalez Corujo
- **CoL City Information Centre** | Doris Negrier



What does 'Culture' mean to you?

...Food...  
...Congregation...  
...Good Culture is like Marmite causes **FRICITION**...  
...A development...

...What can we **LEARN** from the **NIGHT ECONOMY**?

1 - **STREET PARTY**  
→ One concentrated events with a series of activations through the year...  
→ for **EVERYONE**...

2  
...Workshops for a range  
...Outdoor & Public Spaces...  
**TASTER SESSIONS**

3  
...The **COMMUNITY TAKEOVER**  
...Open Spaces to the Public...  
A Framework to celebrate...

4  
...Kill the **DRAGON**  
...ALL YEAR **ARTISTIC PROGRAMING**...

...City of London **WELCOMES**...  
...Open the Gates...  
...Make the Space  
...Remove the **EGO**...

# CULTURE...

**Storytelling**  
...can be **EXCLUSIONARY**  
...you can't sit with us...  
...Ability to **challenge + SURPRISE**...

...through **CLASS + EXPENSE**  
...City Workers are not a **GENERIC GROUP**...  
...they are all **human beings**...

...it should feel like a **MELTING POT?**  
...What is the Route to **ACCESS**...  
...Build **TRUST** in different communities...

What are our 'Cultural' Assets?...

...Different groups have different needs of the City...  
...Accessible to all...  
...Preserve **PRINT**...

...Build **TRUST** in different communities...

**PLAYFUL**



# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

TURN THE GATES INTO A WELCOME	GIVE PEOPLE PERMISSION TO DO THEIR OWN THING	A JOINED-UP CALENDAR EVERYONE CAN CONTRIBUTE TO	YOU CAN GET LOST – AND THAT’S THE MAGIC	DIFFERENT PEOPLE, DIFFERENT TIMES, DIFFERENT NEEDS
<p>Participants reflected on how the City’s built environment and branding can feel cold, formal and uninviting – especially to those unfamiliar with its customs or symbols. Coats of arms, dragons, closed doors and minimal signage can all signal exclusion. Culture, they argued, must not only be accessible in content, but in its physical cues and visual language.</p>	<p>Participants were clear: meaningful cultural engagement comes from ownership. Rather than always commissioning or curating from the top, they urged the City to support residents, artists and community leaders to shape and deliver their own creative activity – from local festivals to one-off events. Trust, funding and practical support are key.</p>	<p>Several participants proposed the idea of a collaborative cultural network - one that could connect big institutions, local leaders and smaller organisations through shared programming, shared visibility and shared ambition. This wasn’t about more content, but more coordination and equity.</p>	<p>Participants celebrated the City’s unusual geography - its alleys, courtyards and layers of history - as a unique cultural asset. Rather than being a problem, the City’s sense of mystery and discovery was seen as a strength to build on. Culture, they suggested, should invite curiosity.</p>	<p>Participants recognised that the Square Mile isn’t one place - it changes throughout the day and week. From city workers and school groups to tourists and late-night visitors, the needs, behaviours and cultural appetites of its audiences are constantly shifting. The cultural offer must reflect this rhythm.</p>
<p><i>“The City’s gates, dragons and symbols make it feel like a castle you can’t enter.”</i></p>	<p><i>“It’s not about imposing what we have – it’s about giving people permission to do their own thing.”</i></p>	<p><i>“What if people could design their own cultural city?”</i></p>	<p><i>“You never know which version of the City you’re going to get – and I love that.”</i></p>	<p><i>“The City changes depending on the hour – the offer should too.”</i></p>



# HERITAGE







## KEY QUESTIONS

**#1** In a time of changing audiences, technology and cultural trends, what does the future of heritage in the City of London look like and how does it remain relevant and a living part of the City's identity?

**#2** How can underrepresented histories and voices be highlighted in the City's cultural landscape and engage with diverse audiences?

**#3** What opportunities exist to make heritage more interactive and engaging?

**#4** How can the City's historic spaces be activated for cultural programming?

## ATTENDEES

- **Guildhall Art Gallery & Amphitheatre** | Liz Scott
- **Leadenhall Market** | Catherine Jordan Jones
- **Tower Bridge** | Amy O'Rourke
- **St Paul's Cathedral** | Sandra Lynes Timbrell
- **Migration Museum** | Sophie Henderson
- **Migration Museum** | Aditi Anand
- **London Museum** | Lauren Parker
- **Tower of London** | Dan Wolfe
- **Historic England** | Hannah Parham
- **Area Dean of the City Deanery** | Reverend Laura Jørgensen
- **Temple Church** | Paul Cutts
- **City Guides** | Mario Beneventi
- **City Guides** | Susannah Cohen
- **Open City** | Celia Mead
- **The London Archives** | Laurence Ward
- **Counter Culture** | Matt Peacock MBE
- **CoL Natural Environment** | Andrew Impey
- **CoL Natural Environment** | Rob Shakespeare
- **CoL Guildhall Art Gallery** | George Hunt







# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## IF YOU LOVE IT – LET IT GO

There was a strong call to shift curatorial power – allowing new voices to shape how stories are told. Participants emphasised that engaging underrepresented communities means letting go of control, not just inviting input. From youth-led Open House takeovers to co-curated walking tours, they highlighted the potential of collaborative authorship.

*“Unless we give up the ownership of the curatorial voice, we won’t hear the narratives they care about.”*

## THE STORIES WE TELL DON’T SPEAK TO MOST PEOPLE

Heritage narratives in the City are still seen as linear, traditional and elite. Audiences who don’t see themselves reflected – in content or setting – feel excluded. Participants shared that even £1 entry schemes didn’t attract local audiences, because the offer still didn’t feel relevant to them.

*“It’s not the price – it’s the story. What we’re telling just doesn’t connect.”*

## PEOPLE DON’T KNOW WHAT’S HERE – OR HOW TO FIND IT

Fragmented communication and physical signage were flagged as major barriers. From disused shop fronts to hidden venues behind locked gates, the message was clear: the City can feel invisible to newcomers and unknowable to residents. Even seasoned heritage professionals said they didn’t know where to look.

*“We’re not short on assets – we’re short on clarity.”*

## THE BUILDINGS ARE BIG – BUT THE WELCOME IS SMALL

Landmark heritage sites like St Paul’s and the Tower of London were seen as impressive but intimidating, particularly for domestic audiences. The scale, symbolism, and associations with royalty or power act as silent gatekeepers, reinforcing perceptions that “this isn’t for me.”

*“We’re seen as the place where Charles and Diana got married – not the place for you to drop in with your kids.”*

## THERE’S NO TIME LEFT TO JOIN THE DOTS

Capacity emerged as one of the most urgent challenges. Heritage organisations of all sizes felt under-resourced, overstretched and siloed – despite being located within walking distance of one another. The lack of joined-up strategy across the Square Mile is stalling impact.

*“We’re all doing brilliant things – but there’s no time left in the day to connect them.”*



# CULTURAL INVESTORS







## KEY QUESTIONS

**#1** What impacts do investors want to see from culture in the City and what is the wider role of the City as a national investor in culture?

**#2** How can cultural projects align with investor priorities to attract sustainable funding?

**#3** How can cultural philanthropy be encouraged within the City's business sector?

**#4** How can cultural investment drive economic and social benefits for the City?

## ATTENDEES

- **CoL Chamberlain's** | Daniel Peattie
- **Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation** | Louisa Hrabowy
- **Arts Council England** | Sabine Unamun
- **City Bridge Foundation** | Jack Joslin
- **Goldsmiths' Company** | Hugh Curthoys
- **Goldsmiths' Company** | Sarah Jurado
- **The Founders' Company** | Rev Keith Stephenson
- **The Worshipful Company of Arts Scholars** | Roy Sully
- **Painters Stainers' Company** | Alice Pearson
- **Temple Bar Trust** | Peter Murray
- **Aviva** | Natasha Richards
- **Brookfield Property** | Samantha (Saff) Williams
- **CoL City Information Centre** | Madeleine Gowers
- **CoL Guildhall Art Gallery** | Nancy Wade
- **CoL Guildhall Art Gallery** | Jenny Gonzalez Corujo



What does 'Culture' mean to you?

Fun

...Self-Expression...

...Spiritual & Fulfilling...

...A sense of PLACE...

...A GATEWAY to NEW THINGS...

...Curiosity...

...Mind Blowing...

...It is SUBJECTIVE

Who gets to decide?

...The City has more CULTURE + HERITAGE per Square Mile than anywhere...

# CULTURAL INVESTMENT

...Success in PUBLIC SPACES...

What are some of the 'barriers' to access...

...STRIKING the BALANCE

...preserve the Mystery...

the View that if we open the Streets, it will be Dirty...

...People are looking for GUIDANCE

to be able to 'stumble' upon Culture...

2

COMMEMORATION CEREMONY...

...Hosted at the Guildhall Art Gallery...

...only possible because we had the Space...

3

FESTIVAL FORMATS...

→ Participants dressed as Soldiers from the Ages...

→ Collective History...

1

GOLDEN KEY WEEKEND...

→ Reinforce our Presence in the City...

...Happenings on a trail...

Employee Engagement...

LITY OF LONDON CULTURAL STRAT  
...Be clear on what you are INTENDING

Build IMPACT in (Retain + Sustain)

THE HOME OF

the CULTURAL STRATEGY...

make Accessible...

...We have built a RELATIONSHIP with the city...

CROMWELL EVENT...

→ EVENT that underdelivered...



# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## SUPPORT CAN BE ALLOWING A RISK TO HAPPEN

Participants emphasised that backing culture doesn't always mean guaranteeing a safe return. Sometimes the most powerful form of support is permission to try, fail, and grow. Investors called for braver, more experimental funding approaches that make space for creative risk-taking - especially when outcomes aren't easy to measure.

*"Sometimes support is just allowing the risk to happen."*

## THE CITY COULD SAY YES

It can be challenging to initiate creative partnerships with the City - not because people aren't willing, but because the pathways are unclear and the systems can feel complex. Delays, formalities, and uncertainty often stall good ideas before they get going. The group acknowledged the Corporation's potential to be a brilliant enabler - if made more accessible.

*"Sometimes it's not that the City says no - it's just hard to know how to begin."*

## POWER SHARING DOESN'T MEAN LOSING POWER

There was an appetite for more collaborative and equitable funding relationships - ones that are rooted in trust, co-design, and transparency. Participants noted that investors and institutions alike must shift from "gatekeeping" to shared stewardship, particularly when it comes to engaging with underrepresented groups.

*"Letting go of control doesn't mean giving up your seat — it means making room for others at the table."*

## START SMALL TO BRING IN DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

Participants highlighted the importance of small-scale, informal cultural moments as low-risk entry points for wider public engagement. These projects often offer intimacy, spontaneity, and local relevance — qualities that can be lost in larger, heavily branded interventions.

*"Big isn't always better - small things can unlock something much bigger later on."*

## WE NEED TO MEASURE WHAT ACTUALLY MATTERS

Participants questioned traditional return-on-investment models that prioritise footfall or media impressions. Instead, they championed metrics that focus on joy, connection, and long-term community impact — particularly for projects that shift perception, build confidence or create new social value.

*"We need to fund what works for people, not just what looks good on paper."*



# PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT







## KEY QUESTIONS

**#1** How can the City of London work with the property sector to ensure a sustainable, mutually beneficial cultural offer?

**#2** What policies or funding mechanisms could support culture-led development?

**#3** How can culture be embedded into new developments to create vibrant public spaces?

**#4** Can your experience to date inform how the Cultural Planning Framework can be utilised effectively?

## ATTENDEES

- **Publica** | Tess McCann
- **Publica** | Astrid Bois d'Enghien
- **GLA** | Rachael Roe
- **Gerald Eve** | Edward Kitchen
- **DP9** | Tiffany Hepher
- **DP9** | Jonathan Smith
- **Brookfield Property** | Dan Scanlon
- **L&O** | Loris Tinacci
- **Stanhope Plc** | Andrew Highton
- **H Properties** | Andrew Bradnam
- **Avison Young** | Mike Cook
- **AXA IM** | Rob Samuel
- **DSDHA** | Deborah Saunt
- **Dominus Real Estate** | Ian Fergusson
- **British Land** | Geoff Scodie
- **LandSec** | Oliver Hunt
- **LandSec** | Ross Sayers
- **Multiplex** | Danny Meaden
- **Streetsense** | Rosie Haslem
- **Fletcher Priest Architects** | Ben Koslowski
- **Spice Design** | Karen Cook
- **Forth** | Dee Halligan
- **HATCH** | Andrew Caruso
- **Futurecity** | George Kekatos
- **CoL Culture** | Lala Thorpe
- **Eastern City BID** | Henry Johnston



What does 'Culture' mean to you?

...need a RELAXING of PLANNING POLICY...

How do they differ roadmap... from one another...

There are Multiple Plans coming to Fruition...

SPECIFIC VISION based on what people want...

There is a need for a SHARED VISION...

# PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT

...the SPACES between BUILDINGS are the best for CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT...

CULTURE means different things to different people...

Need for a SHARED DEFINITION...

...It's NOT about coming up with

ONE

shiny new idea...

...Better to come up with a Vision and Processes...

...We have some GREAT SPACES & EMPTY STREETS. We need to make more of...

Now to encourage people to stay...

the City feels SAFE...

...Not just putting a couple of EMPTY FLOORS in a building...

Leisure

Culture...

Retail

Footfall is down since pre-covid...

International visitors are making that up...

for the STRATEGIES to work towards...

...It's in the DNA of the City to want to do something...

...it has to be co-authored...

...can't wait to be led...

WE WANT... want to be INVOLVED...

CO-AUTHORED

1. ...SOLUTIONS need to be FINANCIALLY SUSTAINABLE...

2. ...NEED A SPACE to TEST, PLAY & EXPERIMENT...

3. ...START with the WORKFORCE...

4. ...JOINT INCENTIVES... what will keep people here after work?

5. ...Think of the City as an Enabler...

build in Flexibility...

6. ...Go on the JOURNEY TOGETHER

...Work with Land Trust...



# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## THE CITY HAS AN IDENTITY CRISIS

Participants noted that the City's cultural purpose feels fragmented, with too many overlapping strategies diluting impact. The absence of a bold, unifying vision makes it harder for developers to align with or champion cultural outcomes. Several felt that the City needs to be clearer about what kind of culture it supports and why.

*"There's so much potential, but there isn't a shared narrative. It feels like we're guessing."*

## THERE IS SO MUCH ALREADY HERE. LET'S USE IT BETTER

Rather than building new venues, participants encouraged rethinking how existing spaces can be used more effectively. Churches, livery halls, historic buildings and the public realm were all seen as untapped cultural infrastructure. The problem is often one of access, visibility, or lack of programming support.

*"We don't need to build more boxes – we need to bring the ones we have to life."*

## STOP PEPPER-POTTING. WE NEED CRITICAL MASS

Scattering cultural spaces across individual developments often leads to underused and disconnected venues. Participants called for a more strategic, clustered approach that builds energy and visibility through proximity and scale.

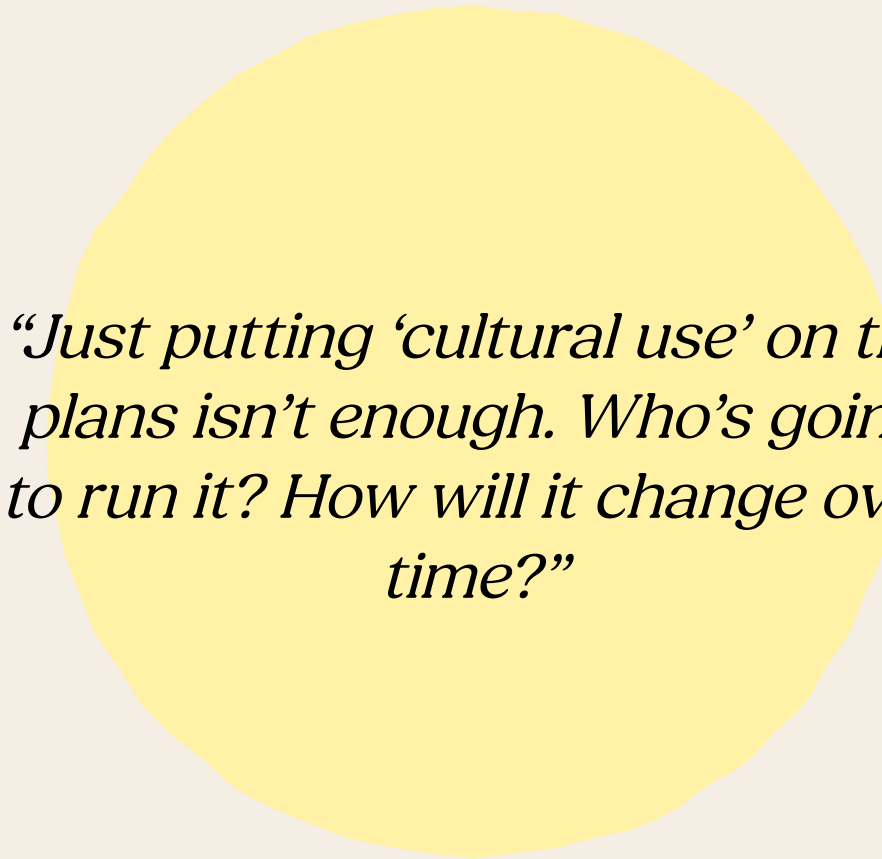
*"We're putting a gallery here, a studio there... but there's no ecosystem."*



# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## WE NEED TO STOP DESIGNING SPACES AND START DESIGNING PROCESSES

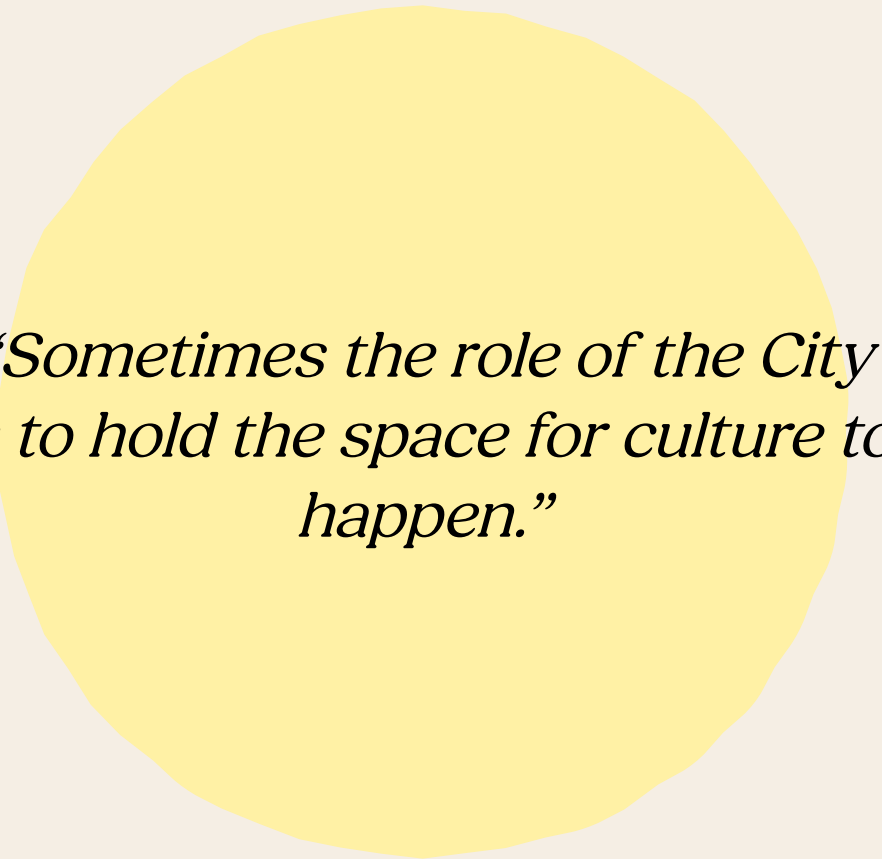
Too often, cultural provision in new developments is reduced to a designated unit or shell space, with little thought for how it will actually be activated. Participants urged a shift in thinking – from static spaces to flexible, evolving programmes supported by partnership, funding and trust.



*“Just putting ‘cultural use’ on the plans isn’t enough. Who’s going to run it? How will it change over time?”*

## HELP US TO DE-RISK INVESTMENT

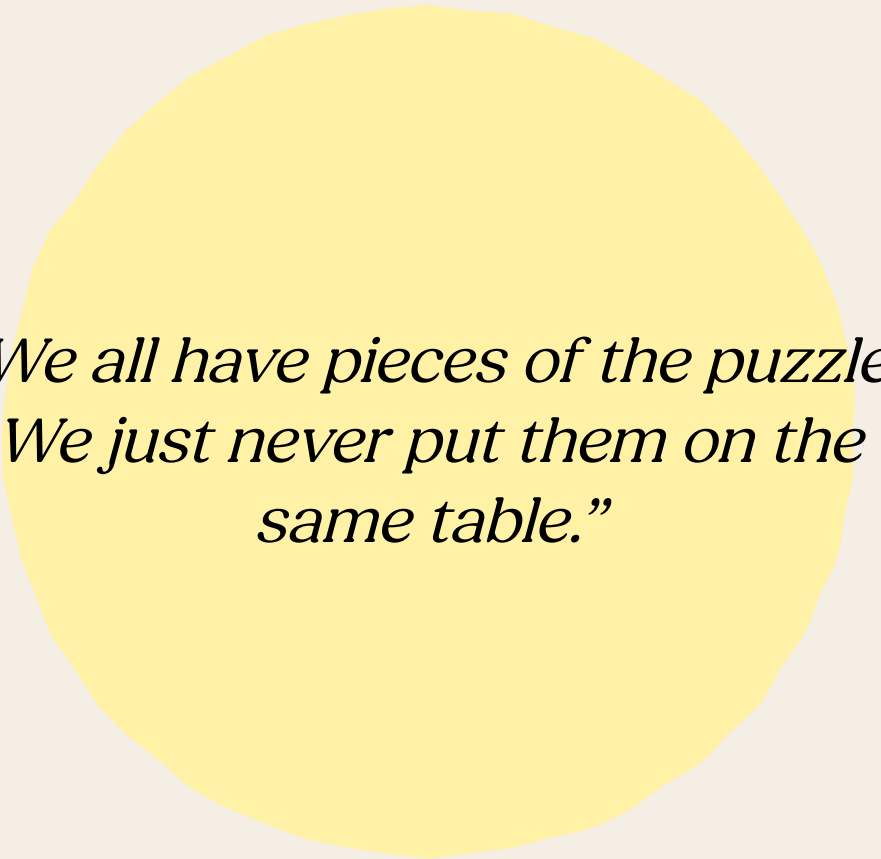
Participants acknowledged that many cultural uses are not commercially viable on their own, especially in high-value areas like the City. There was consensus that the Corporation can play a vital enabling role – by brokering partnerships, piloting policy, and using its own assets creatively.



*“Sometimes the role of the City is to hold the space for culture to happen.”*

## COMMUNICATION IS EVERYTHING

Participants expressed frustration with fragmented communication within the Corporation and between the public and private sectors. A lack of clarity around roles, opportunities, and existing insight was seen as a barrier to cultural partnership and innovation.



*“We all have pieces of the puzzle. We just never put them on the same table.”*



# ONE-TO-ONES



# ONE-TO-ONES

## WHO WE SPOKE TO



As part of the City of London Cultural Strategy consultation, we held a series of one-to-one conversations with people who think about culture every day – as funders, programmers, educators, civic leaders and changemakers.

Some were based in the City. Others work across borough boundaries or national networks. All brought honest reflections, sharp ideas and a shared belief that culture can, and should, play a bigger role in shaping the City's future. To date we have spoken with:

- **Greater London Authority (GLA)**
- **Arts Council England**
- **Local Government Association (LGA)**
- **Historic England**
- **English Heritage**
- **Camden Council**
- **Hackney Council**
- **Islington Council**
- **Tower Hamlets Council**
- **Barbican Centre**
- **London Museum**
- **Leadenhall Market**
- **Bank of England**
- **Bloomberg Philanthropies**
- **City of London Freeman's School**
- **City of London Corporation, Town Clerk's**
- **City of London Corporation, Corporate Strategy and Performance**

These weren't formal interviews, they were honest exchanges grounded in shared purpose. We asked what's working, what's getting in the way, and what could make the biggest difference. What follows are the key themes that emerged.



# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## TELL A PEOPLE-FIRST STORY

The City has a rich cultural identity, but it often gets told through architecture, heritage and status. What's missing is a human thread. The story of the City should centre the people who've shaped it across generations – especially those who came through waves of migration and made the City what it is. Culture isn't just what's been preserved, it's what's been contributed. A more inclusive narrative would help the City feel relevant, relatable and rooted in lived experience.

## CELEBRATE WHAT ALREADY EXISTS

There's no shortage of cultural potential here, it just isn't always visible. Rooftop gardens, public squares, alleyways, churches, civic archives – the City is full of spaces with stories to tell. Many called for a strategy that celebrates and amplifies what already exists. Rather than building new, the opportunity lies in connecting, curating and activating what's already here.

## MAKE IT EASY TO BE PART OF

While the City has immense cultural wealth, many described barriers to getting involved – from unclear processes to formal gatekeeping. For smaller organisations, independent artists and neighbouring boroughs, the City can feel distant and difficult to navigate. People asked for simpler access to space, more visible points of contact, and clearer routes into commissioning. Generosity, they noted, isn't just about money – it's about attitude and structure.



# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## FROM AUDIENCES TO COLLABORATORS

Too often, the City's culture is experienced as a one-way broadcast, leaving many communities on the outside. It's not enough for people to attend events; they must be invited to help create them. Stakeholders are calling for a shift in the cultural experience—from passive audiences to active collaborators. This means establishing platforms that empower local voices, ensuring that programme design is informed by those who live and work in the City.

## REAL PARTNERSHIP MEANS CO-AUTHORSHIP

Consultation is a start, but true partnership demands co-authorship. Stakeholders stress that the strategy should be built from the ground up, with ongoing involvement from all sectors—from local boroughs to grassroots cultural groups. This approach isn't just about input; it's about shared decision-making and mutual accountability. When every partner has a seat at the table, the cultural strategy becomes a living document that truly reflects collective ownership.

## USE TECH TO OPEN DOORS

There's huge potential for the City to use digital tools more meaningfully – not for innovation's sake, but to break down barriers. People want a simpler way to know what's on, who it's for, and how to get involved. From a shared cultural calendar to a single access point for opportunities, better digital infrastructure could make the City's cultural life easier to navigate and easier to belong to. Tech can't replace human connection, but it can help build it, if designed with equity in mind.



# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## A STRATEGY SHOULDN'T SIT ON A SHELF

There was a clear message: don't write a document that gathers dust. People want a strategy that's living, practical and adaptable – something they can use, shape, and see reflected in action. That means clear visual frameworks, real-time updates, and feedback loops built in. The best strategies aren't static, they evolve, reflect and invite ongoing participation.

## EXPERIMENTATION BUILDS TRUST, NOT RISK

There was strong encouragement for the City to try things, test ideas and show its working. Rather than aiming for perfection, people suggested a more open approach – one that includes pilot programmes, reflection points and space for failure. Done well, this signals confidence and flexibility. It invites others in, and shows that culture in the City is something we're building together.

## CULTURE IS A WAY OF WORKING

Culture is often seen as a separate strand of policy, but it's so much more than that. It's a tool for improving health, strengthening local identity, tackling inequality and driving regeneration. The most forward-thinking Councils are embedding culture across education, planning, public realm and healthcare. To lead by example, the City must do the same – working across departments, aligning priorities, and building culture into the everyday.



# CREATIVE CONSULTATION



# CREATIVE CONSULTATION OUR APPROACH



Creative consultation helps us meet people where they are, literally and emotionally.

Between April and June 2025, we commissioned two artists, Sabrina Fearon Melville and Lu Williams, to devise and deliver a series of creative consultation activities in the City of London.

By taking this approach we invited a broader range of voices into the conversation; from workers on a lunch break to curious tourists and long-time residents.

This method often sparks imagination and unlocks ideas that don't always emerge in formal settings. They also lower the barriers to participation, making it easier and more enjoyable for people to share their thoughts, hopes and experiences.



# STREET-LEVEL STORYTELLING

**ARTIST: SABRINA FEARON MELVILLE**

This consultation took a street-level, story-led approach to understand how people engage with the City of London, particularly those working, socialising, or simply passing through.

With a background in journalism and a focus on real-time, public engagement, the artist centred their methodology around voxpops and informal street interviews. These were conducted in key locations identified as areas rich with everyday interactions and potential insight.

**Locations included:** Leadenhall Market, Barbican Centre, Liverpool Street Station, St Giles Cripplegate, St Paul's Cathedral, Moorgate Station, Barbican Estate, Golden Lane Estate, Fleet Street, Finsbury Circus Gardens and Guildhall.

The artist combined documentary photography with first-person testimonies to build a textured picture of City life. The resulting material was collated into a creative report, blending written responses and photography, offering an accessible record of public perspectives.





# ZINE-MAKING WORKSHOPS

## ARTIST: LU WILLIAMS

This artist approached the consultation through a series of four workshops delivered in collaboration with existing groups and well-known community spaces in the City of London. This included:

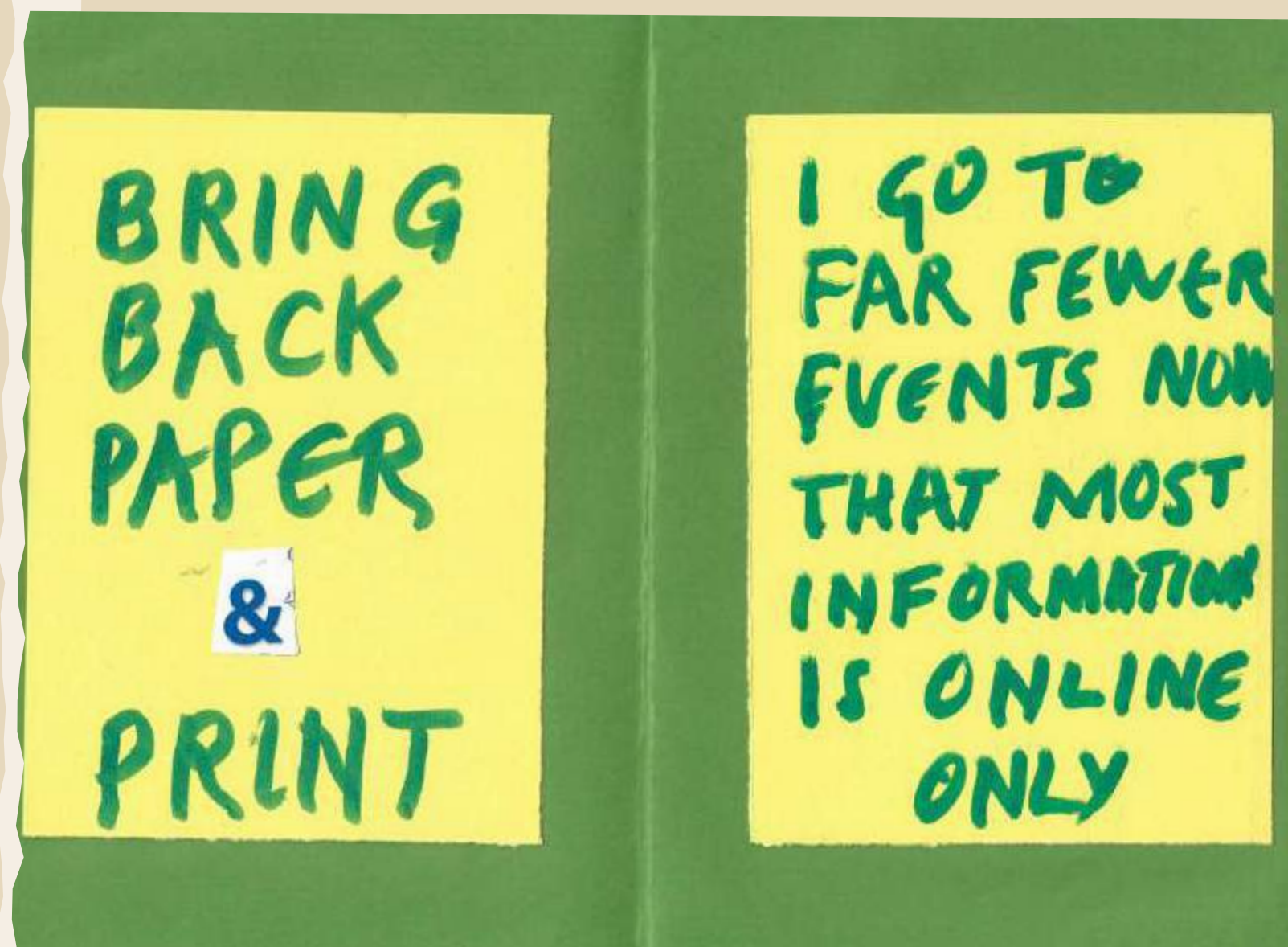
- **Monster Art Club at Barbican Library** - A weekly art session for young people and their parents/ carers.
- **Golden Social at Golden Lane Estate Community Centre** - A social group ran by Age UK for older residents in the City.
- **Dragon Cafe in the City at Shoe Lane Library** - A mental health initiative that runs sessions for anyone who is feeling the pressures of work or life.
- **Artizan Street Library** - An open-to-all, drop-in workshop session.

By introducing zine-making as an accessible and engaging activity, the artist encouraged participants to respond informally to consultation questions through writing, sketching, and collage. Tailored methods were used to appeal to the different demographics participating to ensure the exercise was relevant and engaging.

The final output is a widely accessible digital PDF zine, capturing the stories, ideas and lived experiences of City communities.









# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## MAKE ROOM FOR PEOPLE

Across both consultations, there was a clear call for more inclusive, welcoming places where people can gather, relax and feel connected. Residents and workers alike highlighted the need for spaces that aren't commercial or intimidating. Culture in the City must include everyday sociability; places to simply be, with others.

*"I guess maybe more third spaces... not places to drink but to hang out and chill"*

## A WELCOME WITHOUT LIMITS

Participants consistently raised concerns about affordability, accessibility and representation. They feel that cultural life in the City often feels exclusive, from ticket prices to building entrances and social codes. There was a call to remove financial, physical and psychological barriers through resident discounts, a welcoming public realm and inclusive programming.

*"Not very accessible for disabled people. I cannot afford to do anything. Visiting the City is expensive"*

## AFTER HOURS, STILL OURS

Participants described weekends as quiet, even though there was an acknowledgement that many residents and tourists are still present.

People want to see the City come alive across the full week, with events and activities that span evenings and weekends in order to fill the gap that feels so vast once the workers depart.

*"It feels empty once the workers evacuate the work places... spaces should be better utilised of a weekend"*



# WHAT WE HEARD: KEY TAKEAWAYS

## GIVE CULTURE A MEGAPHONE

Many people simply didn't know what cultural events or resources were available. Some walked past the Barbican daily without realising what was inside. Others praised projects like 3D printing labs and community gardens, but had never seen them promoted. People want clear signage, regular updates, and multi-format communications that feel welcoming and easy to understand.

*"Bring back paper and print, I go to far fewer events now that most information is online only"*

## PARTICIPATION IS POWER

Participants responded strongly to hands-on, accessible creative activities; from crafting lessons to community cooking classes. These forms of participation allowed people to share their stories, build skills, and feel part of the City's cultural life. There was a clear desire for opportunities to contribute, not just consume.

*"We want to be involved... not just an audience member"*

## THE CITY, UNLOCKED

There is huge enthusiasm for unlocking spaces that feel closed off, from livery halls and rooftop gardens to private clubs and underutilised libraries. Participants suggested using these sites for events, markets, or simply as places to visit. When exclusive places are opened up, the whole City feels more inclusive.

*"There are alot of spaces that say 'Keep Out', if we opened these up, the City would feel like a different place"*



# CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS



# ALIGNING WITH EMERGING THEMES



This phase of consultation has allowed us to test, challenge and deepen our understanding of the 7 emerging themes highlighted within the City of London Cultural Strategy Research & Insights Report:

- **Where Culture Means Business** - The rise in creative industries and growing involvement of businesses in culture makes for exciting opportunities to link culture and commerce.
- **Seeding a Cultural Ecosystem** - Difficulties in attracting, retaining and supporting independent cultural organisations and creatives is holding back the cultural potential of the City.
- **City of Firsts** - The City can be a major contributor to cultural opportunity from young children to creatives starting their careers in the cultural sector.
- **Old City, New Stories** - The heritage of the City is a unique superpower. In a changing society, telling the human stories of the City from diverse perspectives can make the old feel new.
- **The World in One Square Mile** - Few places in the world have greater global links than the City. It can use these networks to attract global culture and share London's culture with the world.
- **Building for the Next Century** - New development presents a generational opportunity to embed cultural infrastructure in the City for the long-term
- **Culture That Cares** - Culture has an important role to play in improving the mental health of workers and residents in the busy City environment.

We have heard about everyday frustrations, moments of inspiration, and the gaps people feel when it comes to culture in the City, providing lived experience insights that take forward these themes.



# ALIGNING WITH EMERGING THEMES

## WHERE CULTURE MEANS BUSINESS

- There is a generational shift in the cultural patterns of younger and older workers, with younger workers more likely to be creative themselves and seeking a broader range of cultural experiences
- Workers want quick, informal experiences – things they can drop into between meetings or on the way home.
- Culture is seen as part of the City's appeal to talent and investment – but only if it's visible, accessible and relevant.
- The shift in working patterns was mentioned across every session. If the City wants to remain attractive, culture has to adapt to a changing rhythm.
- BAME workers are currently less engaged in the City's cultural offer and as the City's workforce becomes increasingly diverse, culture needs to adapt.

## SEEDING A CREATIVE ECOSYSTEM

- Demand for broader cultural forms like fashion, comedy, live music, pop-ups and more highlight the need for variety in spaces and programming.
- Many see themselves as cultural producers, not just audiences. But they feel there are few visible pathways to create and contribute in the City.
- People want space. Especially young creatives, freelancers, and grassroots organisers.
- Participants called for better signposting, smaller-scale funding, and more collaborative working across institutions and independent creatives.
- There is appetite and encouragement for the City to experiment and try things in the development of its cultural offer.
- Whilst supporting the new, the City needs to do more to amplify what it already has.

## CITY OF FIRSTS

- The cultural offer needs to support young people's creative development from childhood to early adulthood, not just young children.
- Consistent experiences and engagement will build a generation of people who see the City as a cultural place, not just one-off experiences or events.
- Young people want to be actively involved in shaping the culture of the City, not just have it presented to them
- There are strong opportunities for the City to play a role in building creative skills that connect young people to future job opportunities
- There is desire to make the most of the City's quieter weekends by closing roads and turning them into lively cultural hubs.



# ALIGNING WITH EMERGING THEMES

## OLD CITY, NEW STORIES

- The City's history remains the most potent attraction for visitors. But people often don't know what there is to see and where to find it.
- There was a strong call to surface hidden narratives: lesser-known histories, marginalised voices, overlooked spaces.
- People want the City to embrace its complexity – not just as a place of history, but as somewhere evolving in real time, showing that clash of old and new.
- Many described the City's cultural offer as too polished. Participants asked for more experimentation, more risk, and more storytelling that feels alive and unfinished..

## THE WORLD IN ONE SQUARE MILE

- Participants want a cultural offer that matches the City's global status; bold, distinctive, and open to new voices.
- People called for stronger international partnerships, more cultural exchange, and a wider range of voices in programming.
- Festivals were raised as a particular opportunity to showcase and develop the City's international offer.
- But global should never mean generic: many felt that the City's strength is in hosting specific, unexpected stories from all over the world.
- The City should work with the rest of London to develop a strong international approach.

## BUILDING FOR THE NEXT CENTURY

- Cultural development should focus on creating critical mass, highlighting the potential of key cultural focal areas.
- People don't just want big new buildings. They want better use of what's already here.
- There's a desire for outdoor culture, temporary interventions, and flexible use of underused spaces.
- Development needs a clear cultural vision to respond to.
- The idea of sustainability was linked to continuity – investing in cultural life over time, not just one-off moments.
- And many raised the issue of visibility: great work is already happening, but it needs better support and clearer platforms.



# ALIGNING WITH EMERGING THEMES

## CULTURE THAT CARES

- Culture is seen as a tool for connection, joy, and mental health – especially in an environment shaped by high pressure and high pace.
- Families, older residents and disabled participants spoke about the need for more accessible formats, better timing (e.g. daytime events), and spaces that feel safe and welcoming.
- The idea that “culture doesn’t have to be grand to matter” came up again and again.
- Care was also seen as a mindset: listening to communities, allowing space for failure, and valuing what’s already working.





# CONCLUSION

There is a strong appetite for a cultural future in the City of London that is inclusive, experimental and led by the people who live, work, study and spend time here.

What follows are the core themes that emerged across conversations, workshops and creative engagement. These are not abstract values - they are actionable priorities:

- **People want culture that feels relevant to them, not just impressive from afar**
- **People want 'to do'**
- **The Corporation's role is to enable, not control**
- **Make room for the bold, the messy and the new**
- **Culture must feel safe, accessible and human**
- **Reframe heritage for today**
- **People want to celebrate what's already here**
- **Communication is still a major barrier**
- **Culture should be visible in the everyday**
- **The rhythm of working life has changed and culture needs to follow**
- **The weekend gap is real, but it's an opportunity**
- **The City's cultural identity feels unclear, even to those who love it**

The City doesn't need to start from scratch. The foundations are already here - in its people, its places and its potential. What comes next is about listening well, taking bold action, and shaping a strategy that truly belongs to those it's for.



# NEXT STEPS

This report, alongside the earlier Research & Insight phase, forms the foundation of a Living Strategy for culture in the City of London - one that will evolve over the next five years and beyond.

Together, these phases set out what we've heard so far: from the people who live here, work here, visit, and shape culture in the Square Mile. They don't offer a fixed blueprint, but they do offer clear building blocks for what comes next.

The next phase is about turning insight into action. The Cultural Strategy will be co-created with a wide range of stakeholders - not just through consultation, but through genuine partnership and shared ownership. It will be shaped by those who use the City every day, and by those who have historically been excluded or underrepresented within it. This is how we build a strategy that is rooted, relevant and resilient.

The upcoming phases will include:

- Further **one-to-one conversations** to gain in-depth knowledge and build partnerships.
- An **Out & About** week in the City to get to know our 'hidden gems'.
- **Go & See events** open to the general public, enabling people to experience some of the amazing places in the City, ask questions about the strategy and feed in their experiences and opinions.
- The formation of a **40+ strong Cultural Strategy Development Group** to guide and shape the development of the strategy - consisting of major institutions to freelance creatives, businesses to community organisations, developers to charities.
- The formation of a **Corporation Officer Development Group**, bringing together different departments to shape the development of the strategy and ensure that the power of culture is harnessed across the board.
- The formation of **Corporation Member Sessions**, ensuring that the Corporation has oversight and collaboration on every step of the journey.
- **Population Survey of City of London catchment areas** to address gaps in understanding of audiences outside the City but within the City's main catchment, including how the overall experience of place affects their choice of cultural destination.
- **On street survey of City Workers** to gain detailed understanding of the cultural preferences of different worker types and demographic groups.

This isn't the end of the conversation, it's what we build from.



# APPENDICES





## Help Shape the City of London Cultural Strategy



The City of London Corporation is developing a new Cultural Strategy for the Square Mile. The Strategy will set out a bold and practical vision for culture in the Square Mile over the next five years. It will highlight the role of arts, heritage, and creativity in shaping the City as a vibrant, inclusive, and world-class cultural destination. The strategy will identify priorities, partnerships, and opportunities to enhance cultural provision and accessibility for all.

The City Corporation has commissioned Things Made Public to work alongside them on the development of the strategy. We are genuinely committed to ensuring that the strategy is accessible, relevant, and meaningful for the people who live, work, and spend time in the City and as such would really appreciate your input into helping shape it by filling out this short survey.

Either fill in the survey and return it to a member of our staff team or use the QR code above to complete online.

Data collected from this survey will only be used for the development of the strategy and will remain anonymised. If you wish to change or have your data deleted, or have further questions about the Cultural Strategy please contact [enquiries@thingsmadepublic.com](mailto:enquiries@thingsmadepublic.com).



Q1. Please indicate your primary affiliation with the City of London (select one)

Resident	Worker	Business owner	Visitor from UK (leisure)	Visitor from UK (business)	International Visitor (leisure)	International Visitor (business)
Other (please indicate):						

Q2. What is your home postcode or country (if international)?

Q3. What is your age? (select one)

U18	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
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Q4. What is your gender? (select one)

Male	Female	Non-binary	Prefer Not to Say
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Q5. Choose *one* option that best describes your ethnic group or background (circle)

English/Welsh/ Scottish/Northern Irish/British	Irish	Gypsy or Irish Traveller	Other White (please indicate)	
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	Mixed White and Black African	Mixed White and Asian	Other Mixed/Multiple (please indicate)	
Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Chinese	Other Asian (Please indicate)
African		Caribbean	Other Black / African / Caribbean (please indicate)	
Arab	Any other ethnic group (please indicate)			



**Q6. How often do you go to cultural activities in the City of London?** (e.g. museums, galleries, performances, heritage sites, festivals)

Weekly	Monthly	A few times a year	Rarely	Never
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**Q7. In the last 12 months, which of the following have you been to in the City of London?**

Exhibition of art, photography or sculpture	Theatre performance, ballet or opera	Literature event	Cinema screening	Craft exhibition (excluding markets)	Live music event
Arts festival, carnival or market	Street art event	Live dance event	Fashion show	Comedy Event	Esports or gaming event
Other (please specify)					

**Q8. What types of cultural activity would you like to see more of in the City of London?**

Exhibition of art, photography or sculpture	Theatre performance, ballet or opera	Literature event	Cinema screening	Craft exhibition (excluding markets)	Live music event
Arts festival, carnival or market	Street art event	Live dance event	Fashion show	Comedy Event	Esports or gaming event
Other (please specify)					



**Q9. In the last 12 months, which of these things have you done? (Please don't include paid work, school or college or structured academic activities.)**

Written stories, plays or poetry	Read books, graphic novels or magazines	Written, practiced or performed music	Painting, drawing, printmaking, calligraphy or colouring	Crafts (textile, sewing, ceramics, sculpting, carving, woodwork)
Choreographed or performed a drama or dance routine	Designed or programmed video games including on a smartphone or tablet	Made films or videos including original video content and animations	Photography as a hobby	Read news in a printed newspaper
Other (please specify)				

**Q10. What prevents you from doing more cultural activities in the City?**

Cost	Lack of awareness	Accessibility	Timing	Relevance	Other (please specify)	
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**Q11. How would you describe the City of London's cultural identity in three words?**

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**Q12. How important do you think culture is to the City of London's identity?**

Not important	Slightly important	Important	Quite important	Very important
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**Q13. How important do you think culture is to the City of London's economic success?**

Not important	Slightly important	Important	Quite important	Very important
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Distribution Channel	Type	Reach
City Hotel, Attractions and Retail. Network (CHARN)	Network / Forum	149
Visit the City Newsletter	Newsletter	11,000
LDN Instagram	Social Media	23,000
LDN Facebook	Social Media	15,000
Guildhall Art Gallery enews	Newsletter	5,000
Guildhall Art Gallery X	Social Media	127,900
Guildhall Art Gallery Instagram	Social Media	5,757
Guildhall Art Gallery Facebook	Social Media	5,400
Guildhall Art Gallery family enews	Newsletter	2,000
City Culture Network	Network / Forum	100
City Belonging	Network / Forum	3,000
City of London Corporation Intranet	Internal Staff	2,000
Small Business Research & Enterprise Centre LinkedIn	Social Media	2,012
Small Business Research & Enterprise Centre Facebook	Social Media	2000
Livery Company mailing list	Partners	117
Shoelane Library enews	Newsletter	
Shoelane Library Facebook	Social Media	
Artizan St Library enews	Newsletter	
Artizan St Library Facebook	Social Media	
Guildhall Library enews	Newsletter	
Guildhall Library Facebook	Social Media	



Distribution Channel	Type	Reach
Guildhall Library enews	Newsletter	
Guildhall Library Facebook	Social Media	
The London Archive enews	Newsletter	
The London Archive Facebook	Social Media	
Barbican Centre	Partners	
Guildhall School of Music & Drama	Partners	
St Paul's Cathedral	Partners	
Tower Bridge	Partners	
Tower of London	Partners	
Barbican Bulletin	Newsletter	2,200
Social Housing Estate Residents	Newsletter	1700
City Residents Group	Newsletter	270
City of London Corporation eshot	Newsletter	80000
City of London Corporation X	Social Media	79700
City of London Corporation instagram	Social Media	
City of London Corporation LinkedIn	Social Media	78692
City Guides enews	Newsletter	
New London Architecture Newsletter	Newsletter	35,000
London Festival of Architecture Newsletter	Newsletter	25,000
Cultural Strategy Development Group Participants	Partners	
Cultural Strategy Focus Group Participants	Partners	
Cultural Strategy One-to-One Contacts	Partners	



Distribution Channel	Type	Reach
Anatomy - Creative Lives in Progress Forum	Network / Forum	
Eastern Cluster BID Newsletter	Newsletter	
London & Partners	Internal Staff	
City Living Newsletter	Newsletter	
City Information Centre Physical Copies	Physical	
Guildhall Art Gallery Physical Copies	Physical	
Bath house Physical Copies	Physical	
Shoelane Library Physical Copies	Physical	
Artizan St Library Physical Copies	Physical	
Guildhall Library Physical Copies	Physical	
The London Archive Physical Copies	Physical	
Small Business Research & Enterprise Centre Physical Copies	Physical	
London Centre Physical Copies	Physical	
Barbican Housing Physical Copies	Physical	
Guildhall Complex Physical Copies	Physical	
City Churches Physical Copies	Physical	
Community Centres Physical Copies	Physical	
Golden Lane Physical Copies	Physical	
<b>Total</b>		<b>506997</b>



# THANK YOU

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**PUBLIC**

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## CREDITS

Photography by [Tasha Best Photography](#)

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Report authored by Things Made Public in collaboration with the City of London Corporation

With contributions from all workshop participants, survey respondents and stakeholders

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