

City of London Corporation A-board Baseline

February 2025

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Summary

1. A survey was conducted to assess the distribution and purpose of A-boards throughout the City of London. Data collection took place using a Field Maps App from 5 December to 20 January 2025, excluding the holiday period from 21 December to 7 January 2025.
2. Officers found A-boards or Stand obstructions at 830 locations, accounting for 42% of all locations visited.
3. All Wards in the City had A-boards, with Cordwainer displaying the highest percentage of organisations with A-boards at 57%, followed by Aldersgate at 50%, and Billingsgate at 49%.
4. A-boards are predominantly utilised for advertising purposes, accounting for 93% of their usage. Less than one percent of signage is designated exclusively for wayfinding (0.7%), 5.7% serve both for advertising and wayfinding purposes, and 0.6% are utilised for other functions.
5. Most A-boards are placed on public highways, with a smaller proportion on private land.
6. The data shows that the number and location of A-boards has an impact on public spaces and streets and necessitates management to improve accessibility and safety for all individuals in the City of London
7. Given the increase in foot traffic and our policies on accessibility and inclusion, maintaining clear and accessible pavements is a high priority. The baseline study is instrumental in informing future engagement with businesses and to plan for enforcement of the City-wide ban on A-boards.
8. Please note some of the actions or comments written in here have been taken forward to the committee report and have been developed further since this baseline report was written (February 2025).

Introduction

9. In March 2020, the Planning & Transportation Committee approved a City-wide ban to ensure clear and accessible pavements. However, the implementation was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to allow time for foot traffic to recover post-pandemic.
10. Prohibiting the placement of A-boards on any streets enhances the user experience for people walking, including those with sight and mobility impairments, as well as individuals wheeling prams and using mobility aids.
11. With foot traffic increasing and the working population expected to rise, maintaining clear and accessible pavements is crucial for creating inclusive environments that enable people to navigate their surroundings independently and safely.
12. Project updates and proposed delivery were included in discussions with members at the Streets & Walkways Sub Committee in [July 2024](#). Following a meeting with the Chairmen of Streets and Walkways and Planning and Transportation in November 2024, it was agreed to undertake a baseline study ahead of starting engagement with businesses. A baseline would help identify the number of A-board distribution across the City and their purpose.

Methodology

13. To assess the distribution and purpose of A-boards across the City, data collection was conducted using a Field Maps App. Using a specifically designed Geographical Information System (GIS) base layer of 1835 commercial business' locations created by the City Corporation GIS team.
14. The Field Maps App allowed officers to add new businesses to the base layer.
15. For this project we identified an A-board as a simple stand-alone board with a heavy base or two boards creating an 'A' shape, placed on the pavement to attract attention (Figure 1). While a stand or similar, was any object that could cause obstruction outside of a premises that was being used to advertise. These included menu stands, flags, delivery carts and cargo bikes with branding etc (Figure 2).
16. Data Collection was undertaken during working hours (8 – 6pm), from the 5 December to the 20 January 2025. No data was collected from over the Christmas period between 21 December - 7 January 2025. Officers recorded:
 - which organisations/locations had an A-board or stand or both to advertise and promote their business.
 - the number of each A-board or Stand,
 - their use (wayfinding, advertising, or both) and location (private land, public highway or unsure).
17. Officers visited a total of 2012 locations and recorded if that premises or location had an A-board or stand on the Field Map app (Figure 3).
18. After data collection, the data was downloaded and cleansed to fix inconsistencies and improve its quality and reliability.
 - Ten locations were removed from the base layer because they either did not physically exist or the business had closed, resulting in 1,025 original data points remaining.
 - Additionally, 177 new locations were added to the GIS Field Map; however, eight were removed due to incomplete data, leaving 169 new locations.

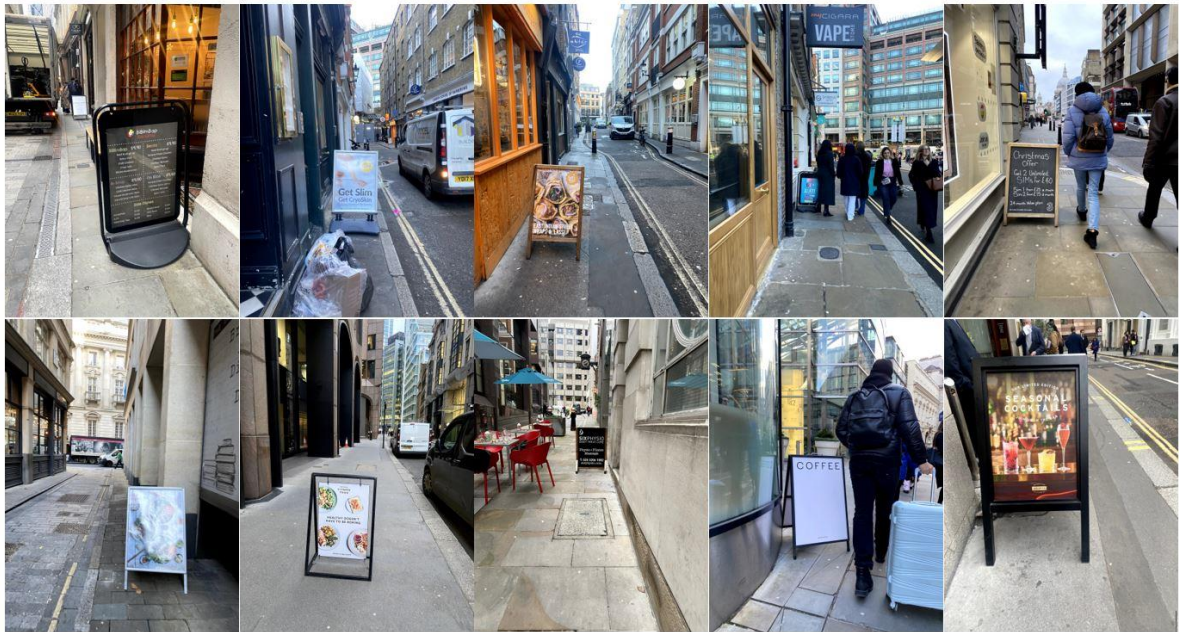


Figure 1: Different types of A-boards recorded as part of this project



Figure 2: Different types of stands or similar obstructions recorded

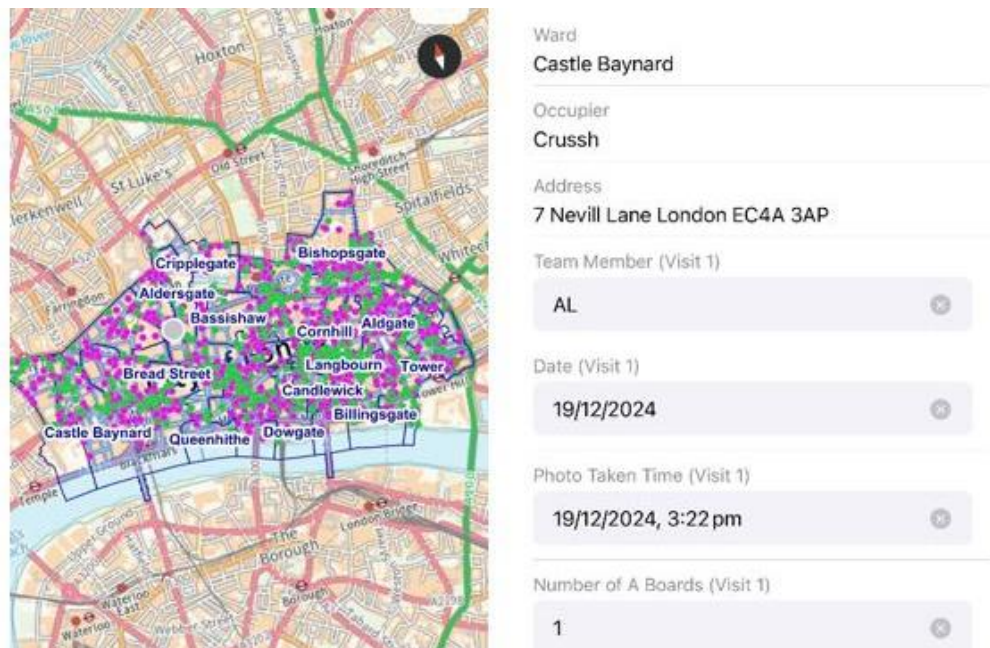


Figure 3: Screen shot of the GIS App data collection page. Green dots indicate locations with obstruction and pink dots are locations without. This is indicative of the app; a full map is shown later in the report.

Results

19. A-boards or stand obstructions were found at 830 of the 1994 locations (42%).

20. Of the 169 new points added majority were new businesses or churches displaying A boards or stands. However, several were not specific to the business location in that area, for example: A Hop on Hop off sign at a bus stop advertising a bus tour, City of London Police sign at Ludgate Hill, City Corporation signs discouraging anti-idling or anti littering signs were found across the City etc. (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Examples of A boards that were not specific to a specific business location

21. A-board dominated with 805 locations recorded as displaying at least one A-boards, 79 had at least one stand or similar, and 54 had both (Figure 5).

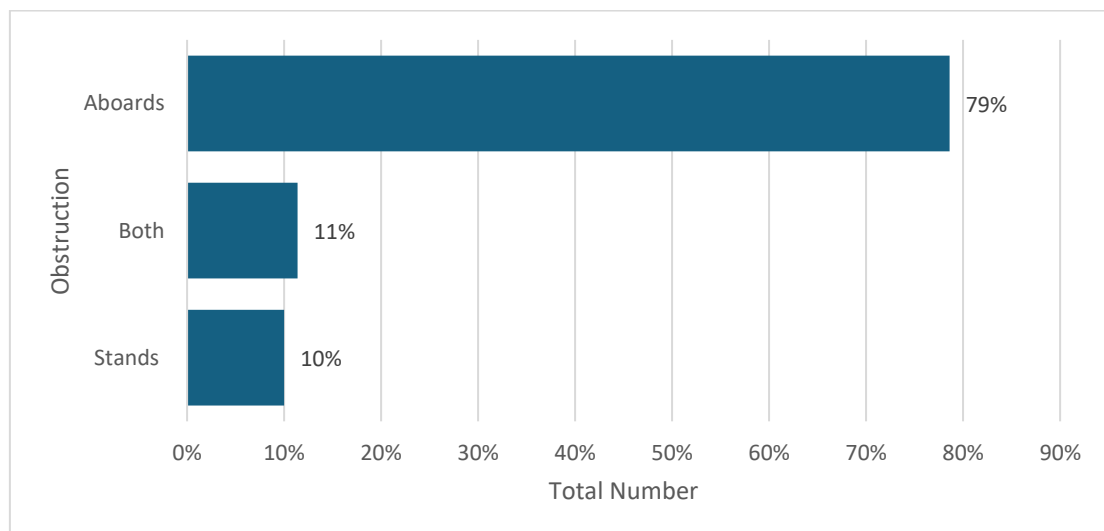


Figure 5: Percentage distribution of total numbers of A-board, Stands or both

22. Out of 805 locations with A-boards, there were a total of 973 boards, with an average of 1.2 per location. Specifically,

- 666 locations had 1 A-board,
- 116 had 2 A-boards,
- 18 had 3 A-boards,
- 4 had 4 A-boards,
- 1 location displayed 5 A-boards.

23. Of the 79 locations there were a total of 124 stands or similar. The average was slightly higher than with A-boards at 1.6. Specifically:
- 58 had 1 stand,
 - 12 had 2 stands,
 - 5 had 3 stands,
 - 1 had 4 stands,
 - 1 had 6 stands,
 - 1 had 7 stands,
 - 1 had 10 stands.
24. A-boards are primarily used for advertising, with 772 boards (93%) serving this purpose. A small percentage (0.7%) are used for wayfinding; these were usually businesses in alleyways. About 5.7% serve both advertising and wayfinding roles, and 0.6% fall under other uses, such as buckets full of flowers, or postcard stands for sale outside or delivery trollies without branding (Table 2). Several locations had a number of items outside taking up considerable space.

Table 1: Distribution of A-boards by purpose

Category	Number of Boards	Percentage
Advertising	772	93%
Wayfinding	6	0.7%
Both advertising and wayfinding	47	5.7%
Other	5	0.6%

25. Officers observed that some businesses were displaying A-boards within their premises, rather than placing them outside, thus keeping the pavements accessible. These businesses were not recorded as having A-boards. Instead, officers photographed these establishments as examples of best practices (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Examples of best practice seen at locations across the City

26. The data on the type of land usage reveals that a significant majority of A-boards are on the public highway (Table 2).

Table 2: Distribution of A-boards by land type

Type of Land	Number	Percentage
Public highway	621	75%
Private land	153	18%
Uncertain	56	7%

27. In terms of distribution A-boards and stand obstructions were spread out across the City of London, present in every Ward (Figure 7).
28. The Ward with the highest number of A-boards is Bishopsgate, with a total of 119 A-boards (Figure 8 and Appendix 1).
29. Dowgate and Bishopsgate have a high number of organisations using A-boards. In these Wards, both the total number of A-boards and the percentage of businesses with A-boards are higher compared to others.
30. Cordwainer has the highest percentage of organisations within each ward that have A-boards 57%, followed by Aldersgate with 50%, and Billingsgate with 49%. Wards like Portsoken, Bridge, and Queenhithe show both low total A-board counts and low percentages of businesses with A-boards (Figure 8).
31. The organisations that had the greatest number of A-boards or stands were:
 - Pret A Manger had A-boards at each of their 29 locations, with 7 locations having a delivery trolley outside the premises.
 - The City of London Corporation had at least 13 locations displaying A-boards.
 - Starbucks had A-boards at all 9 of their locations.
 - Itsu and Café Nero had A-boards at 7 locations.
32. Transport for London has an A-board ban on all the roads it manages across the Transport for London Road Network (also known as red routes), which include several streets in the City such as Bishopsgate, Farringdon Street and New Bridge Street. Enforcement is undertaken on a regular basis, however, there were still A-boards displayed along the TLRN (Figure 7).
33. At City Corporation locations we have already started working on alternative ways to promote messages with those teams (Destination City, Visitor Centre, Air Quality, City Gardens and Recycling), so that we may demonstrate best practice at our own locations.

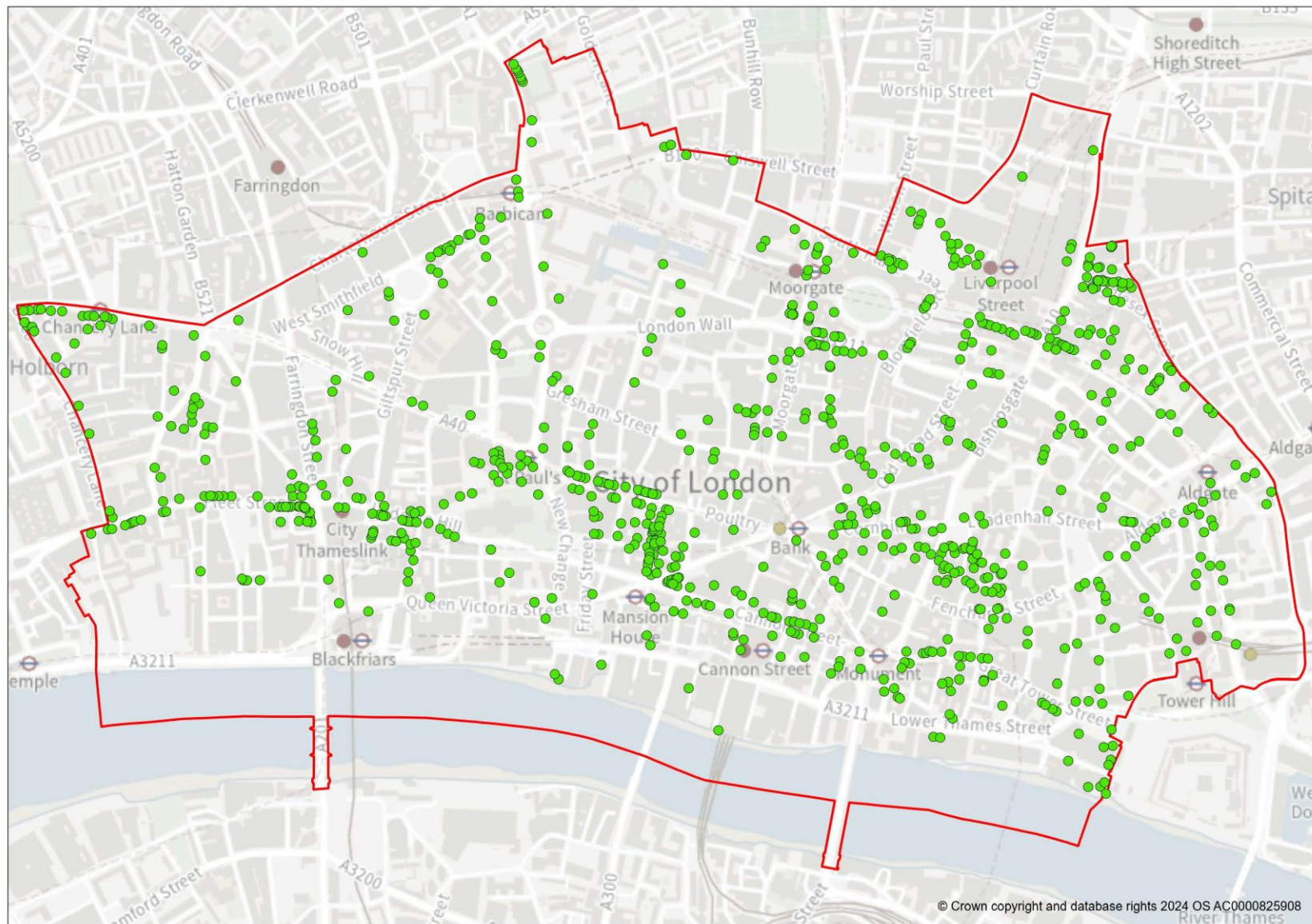


Figure 7: Distribution of A-board and stand locations across the City of London (please note this map was created using all the entered location points, prior to data cleaning so there may be slight discrepancies)

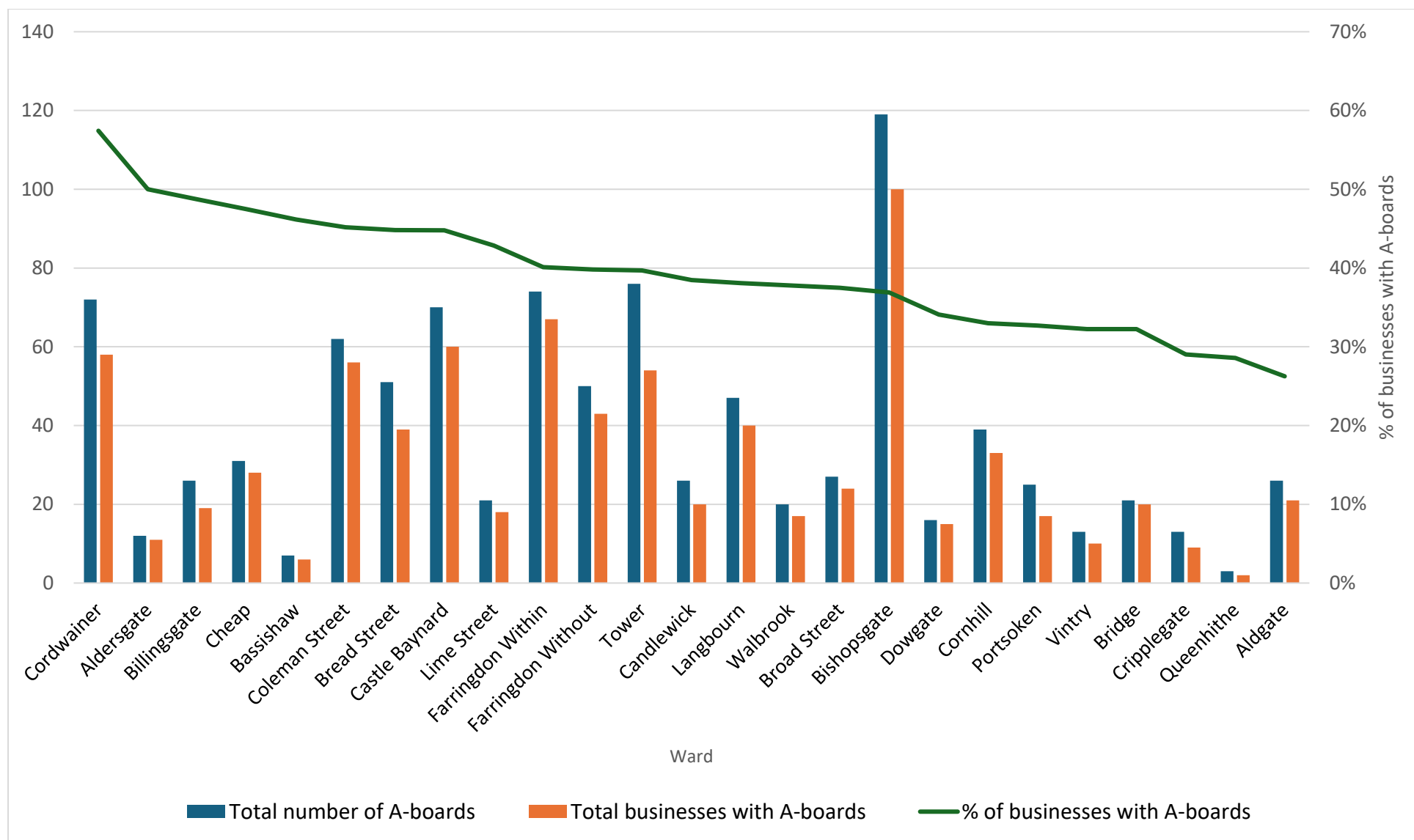


Figure 8: Total number and % of businesses with A-boards by Ward

Limitations

34. The report has a few limitations that should be considered:

- Officers did not document all businesses location visited that were permanently closed, under construction, or unoccupied.
- Some observation data where A-boards were recorded was incomplete and had to be excluded from the dataset. This further supports the point that the actual number of businesses with A-boards or other stands may be higher than recorded.
- Furthermore, due to time constraints, businesses that were closed at the time of recording were not revisited. For example, some cafés close at 3 pm, and the visit occurred at 4 pm.

35. These limitations suggest that the figures presented in the report might be an underestimation of the actual number of A-boards and stands in the City.

Discussion

36. The data analysis reveals a significant usage of A-boards or similar stands in the City of London, with obstructions identified at 830 locations, representing 42% of all surveyed sites. Due to limitations in data collection this figure may be an underestimation.

37. The widespread use of A-boards on public highways poses challenges for maintaining clear and accessible pavements. A-boards causing obstructions can reduce available pavement space, often making it insufficient for people walking, compelling them to step into the carriageway, posing a safety risk. People using push chairs, mobility aids, or wheelchairs could encounter blockages and may need to turn back, posing another safety risk and overexertion for some. For those who are visually impaired, A-boards can present a trip hazard. Additionally, for neurodivergent individuals or those sensitive to visual clutter, areas with numerous A-boards could increase stress and discomfort. A 2014 report to the Planning and Transportation Committee highlighted the challenge around allowing A-boards on wider streets, while banning them on narrower lanes where they don't cause obstruction, it raised concerns of unfair advantage to some businesses. To address this, officers conducted a review that supported the removal of A-boards from all City streets. These were all the reasons that led to the implementation of a City-wide ban on A-boards to ensure clear and accessible pavement.

38. While A-boards are primarily used for advertising, with 93% serving this purpose, they also play a crucial role in wayfinding for a small percentage of businesses (0.7%) located in less visible areas such as alleyways. Effective wayfinding helps customers locate them, which is important in a competitive urban environment. A permit-based system or a grant to support businesses that can make a case that their A-boards is explicitly for wayfinding could be explored.

39. Several businesses are already using best practice and displaying A-boards inside their premises. Encouraging businesses to adopt alternative advertising methods, such as window displays and digital signage, can help maintain clear

pavements while still allowing businesses to attract customers. However, A-boards are viewed as cost effective ways to advertise that require little maintenance. Digital signage has a much higher upfront cost, but could offers benefits like animated content, remote updates, and better visibility. If used long-term and updated frequently, digital signage can be cost-effective over time compared to repeatedly printing new posters for A-boards (Play Digital Signage, ScreenCloud, Signagelive, DISPL & Mvix, 2025).

40. Transport for London has an A-board ban on all the streets it manages across London already, which include some in the City such as Bishopsgate, Farringdon Street and New Bridge Street. Enforcement is undertaken and businesses receive a fixed penalty notice.
41. The challenge posed by the number of A boards being used for advertising in the City of London necessitates a balanced approach that considers both business needs, public safety and equitable access. It is imperative to carefully evaluate the needs of businesses to advertise their services on the Public Highway in line with the City Corporation's commitment to the Equalities Act 2010.

City of London Corporation sites - case study

42. The City Corporation had A-boards at 13 different locations across the city, situated on both public highways and private land. The teams responsible for these boards, including the City of London Air Quality Team, Recycling Team, and the Visitor Centre, were contacted. They were informed about the City-wide ban on A-boards approved in March 2020, which was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and were requested to remove their A-boards. The Streets and Walkways 2024 report was shared with them, and it was explained that removing our A-boards would improve accessibility and underscore the importance of leading by example.
43. Alternative options to A-boards were explored such as using digital screens placed inside their premises, visible through windows, to attract customers. Creating attractive window displays to draw the attention of passersby without the need for external boards. Using digital advertising and social media platforms offered by OneCity, and the possibility to explore further options with our planning team.
44. The response highlighted:
 - Concerns were expressed regarding the impact that removing A-boards would have on the promoting exhibitions, guided tours, events, and campaigns. There were worries about the reduced visibility of landmarks without wayfinding A-boards.
 - Questions were raised about the possibility of exemptions or case-by-case decisions in areas with no accessibility concerns, such as those with wide pavements or where the signs are temporary (campaign).
 - While alternative options for visibility and promotion were discussed, it was noted that limited budgets restrict teams from enhancing their promotional efforts. It was suggested that funding from the City Corporation could be

allocated to support the implementation of other visibility and promotional materials.

45. The varied responses from the case study on City Corporation's teams underscore the need for caution in engaging with businesses. The issue is that most businesses will note that they rely on A-boards for visibility and promotion, and their removal will impact foot traffic and sales, especially for those in less visible locations. Additionally, there are concerns about the financial burden on businesses to adopt alternative advertising methods. Engaging with businesses on a non-consultative decision, could lead businesses to suggest that the City Corporation do not listen to business needs and reopen the debate, and not implementing the ban could undermine the City's commitment to equitable access and public safety.

Next steps

46. The presence of A-Boards on streets, many of which are used solely for advertisements, highlights the need to enforce our policy. Considering the challenges and the importance of a balanced approach, to address the interests of businesses, public safety, and equitable access, we recommend the next steps:

Explore Permit-Based System

47. Collaborate with internal teams in Licensing, Enforcement, and Legal teams to explore the implications of a permit-based system for wayfinding. This need arises from the challenges faced by a small percentage (0.7%) of businesses that use A-boards exclusively for wayfinding.

Explore alternatives and develop case studies with internal teams

48. We could engage further with internal teams (Destination City, Visitor Centre, Air Quality, City Gardens and Recycling) currently using A-boards to review alternative solutions and work through options to identify any serious concerns and understand costs, allowing for adjustments to be made before wider recommendation.

Approach to enforcement

49. Conducting face to face engagement with approximately 830 businesses over the next year would be time and resource intensive. Face to face engagement could lead to a better understanding of the ban and its necessity, potentially giving better compliance. However, there is a risk that businesses could mis-interpret engagement as consultation, re-open the debate and lead discontent when the ban is implemented. It is unlikely that engagement of all businesses will yield much more information, but would further delay implementation of the ban, which could have significant equality implications for our streets and reputation and impact on public using our streets.
50. We recommend that we progress through to an approach for enforcing current A-board policy for all, potentially with very limited exemptions as suggested above. This would include a general notification period to all businesses to allow businesses to engage with us on specific challenges and draw out any issues we haven't identified. City Solicitors will ensure all processes are carried out appropriately within powers permitted as Highway Authority.

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Appendices

Ward summary (STATIC)	Total A-boards	Total businesses	Total businesses with A-boards	% of businesses
Cordwainer	72	101	58	57%
Aldersgate	12	22	11	50%
Billingsgate	26	39	19	49%
Cheap	31	59	28	47%
Bassishaw	7	13	6	46%
Coleman Street	62	124	56	45%
Bread Street	51	87	39	45%
Castle Baynard	70	134	60	45%
Lime Street	21	42	18	43%
Farringdon Within	74	167	67	40%
Farringdon Without	50	108	43	40%
Tower	76	136	54	40%
Candlewick	26	52	20	38%
Langbourn	47	105	40	38%
Walbrook	20	45	17	38%
Broad Street	27	64	24	38%
Bishopsgate	119	271	100	37%
Dowgate	16	44	15	34%
Cornhill	39	100	33	33%
Portsoke	25	52	17	33%
Vintry	13	31	10	32%
Bridge	21	62	20	32%
Cripplegate	13	31	9	29%
Queenhithe	3	7	2	29%

Aldgate	26	80	21	26%
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City Corporation A-boards