

Case study: City Vistas



CITY OF LONDON CORPORATION

The City of London Corporation is the governing body of the Square Mile dedicated to the City, supporting a diverse and successful City within a globally successful UK.

It is the fourth largest funder of heritage in the UK – investing over £100 million every year in the Culture Mile – a new home for contemporary art in the heart of London's working capital.

Pictured: Gardener Nio Guerra in St. Dunstons, is owned and managed by the City Corporation

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What is City Vistas?

City Vistas aims to fill office foyers and vacant spaces in the City of London with creative content – showcasing London's vibrancy and attracting visitors and workers back to the City.

Commercial partners across the City will be invited to participate in the programme – providing exhibition spaces and hiring artistic works from some of London's best and emerging creative talents in order to animate the area's foyers, retail units and commercial spaces.

“London is experiencing one of the slowest returns of footfall among UK cities”

CENTRE FOR CITIES

“Vacant units in the City of London increased by 47% during Covid-19”

THE LOCAL DATA COMPANY

“Your office may lack energy... consider ways to make the office more compelling and interesting”

TRACY BROWER
FORBES

“Companies who focus on their workers will win the war for talent when offices reopen”

JACK KELLY
FORBES

The works will be visible by all from external street level vistas, providing a platform for London's creatives, strengthening public engagement and ensuring the City remains a dynamic and vibrant destination.

Why is it needed?

City Vistas responds to the reduced footfall and risk of empty commercial spaces resulting from the pandemic and highlighted by the Culture & Commerce Taskforce in the 'Fuelling Creative Renewal' report. The report highlights the need for businesses to offer an office experience that attracts staff back from working at home and supports their wellbeing. This comes at a time when London is already facing a crisis in the space available for creative activities.

City Vistas supports London's accelerated recovery from the pandemic by activating vacant and repurposed spaces.

It brings creative and commercial partners together to encourage:

- High quality creative content in City spaces, **enhancing and animating** the local environment
- Increased **footfall** through giving people a **reason to return** and engaging the public with creative works across multiple sites
- Positive perceptions of the City as a **dynamic place** to live, work and visit
- More **stimulating and compelling office** environments, an opportunity for staff and clients to engage with programming on site, enhancing productivity and wellbeing

- A more **resilient** and sustainable creative sector, with new **platforms** for creatives, generating direct financial income
- Positive media attention for the partners involved, demonstrating their leadership in developing **new models** of culture and commerce working together for mutual benefit

How has this been achieved?

City Vistas has been conceived, designed and refined by a project group consisting of more than 20 creative, commercial and civic partners. These partners were identified as part of the wider Taskforce callout for Expressions of Interest and following an initial Start-up session. Over the Summer of 2021, the project group met fortnightly in order to better understand priorities, shape and inform the model, and ultimately develop a feasible and impactful proposition. As a result, a framework for City Vistas has now been developed and a pilot project will shortly go live.

Very quickly in the process, a smaller core group of energised and committed partners surfaced to oversee the development phase of the project, to make swift decisions in between meetings, and to maintain momentum. Alice Black (Founder, ArtULTRA) and Tazie Taysom (Commercial Director, ARTIQ) took on the role of Champions for the project with Sian Bird (Head of Partnerships & Strategic Projects, Culture Mile) chairing the Project Group.



For more information

www.artultra.net
www.artiq.co
www.culturemile.london

The City Corporation provided seed-funding for the initiative in July 2021 which enabled additional project management capacity from ArtULTRA over the summer, to lead the developmental phase of activity for City Vistas and the completion of the delivery and financial model, partnership pack and implementation plan. During this period, the Project team was then able to consult potential investors and partners to test the initial model. This was a hugely useful exercise which surfaced ways in which the model could be adapted and strengthened (for example identifying optimum price points and focusing on more established artists and a limited number of specific sites to begin with before developing a longer-term trail). As a result, the model was then further refined and the approach was adapted to start small and scale.

Thanks to further investment from Culture Mile, the Project team were also able to commission a designer to develop a dedicated brand identity for City Vistas and the assets needed to utilise this.

The Project Team for the developmental phase included:

ARTIQ, ArtULTRA, Barbican, BE Offices, Bompas & Parr, Brookfield Properties, City of London Corporation, City Property Association, Culture Mile, Deutsche Bank, Helical Plc, Legal and General, Linklaters

What progress has been made?

To date, there have been a number of notable achievements for the City Vistas programme:

- A **community of interested commercial, civic and creative organisations** has been established and activated; committed to investing time, energy and resource into co-designing initiatives for mutual benefit.
- Close working between these organisations has developed a **shared language**, enabled a better understanding of motivations/priorities and therefore **informed a stronger model** that addresses animation, increased footfall, return to the office – accelerating the City's recovery.
- **Significant** in-kind support through allocation of resource and expertise from across sectors has been leveraged and **pooled** to co-design new activity
- Organisations involved in these initiatives have benefitted from **skills development and capacity building** – for example increased understanding of the priorities and motivations of other sectors and alternative ways of working.
- A range of **tools** have been developed which can now be shared with others (from license templates to digital collaboration platforms).

The first developmental phase of City Vistas is now complete and the project set-up phase is underway. A core project delivery team is being established to drive City Vistas forward to embed it into core activity and ARTIQ, ArtULTRA and Culture Mile continue to lead this. An initial retail unit pilot project is due to go live in October, in partnership with the City Corporation Public Realm team as part of the Smithfield Activation Programme.

This will provide a much-needed **platform for a series of creative works** that have not yet had the opportunity to be physically shared in public due to the pandemic. It will also provide further **opportunity to learn**, refine and further strengthen the model for this type of activity.

What's the learning so far?

The development phase of the City Vistas programme has been an enormously valuable experience, particularly with so many creative, commercial and civic leaders working so closely together. The Project team have been able to better understand each other's motivations, priorities and ways of working which is informing the development of future activities which will be much stronger as a result.

Other key lessons include:

- Creative activation of repurposed commercial spaces is an **effective tool** in driving recovery – there is an **appetite** across culture, commercial and the civic sectors to deliver this and an understanding of the mutual benefit to be derived from it. Partners are particularly keen on content that aligns with local priorities and **reflects the local area**.
- Unsurprisingly, individual sites are simpler and quicker to activate whilst more ambitious collaborative initiatives involving new content are more complex.
- This led the team to conclude that it is useful to **start small then scale** new activity
- Showcasing **existing works** of art and giving student work a platform is the most popular route due to the lower price point for this and community benefits of supporting local, emerging artists
- There is **appetite** for an ambitious, high-profile collaborative programme that incorporates existing creative collections, emerging artists and the strengthening and diversification of London's creative sector through a series of new commissions. However, this needs to be explored and developed through a phased approach between stakeholders.
- Getting the **timing** right is important – the summer remains difficult for planning/delivery due to holidays, and lead in times for planning and investment needs to be factored in
- Flexibility, setting and **aligning expectations** and recognising the skills partners hold are all key success factors in this type of programme



- **Evidence of impact** needs further exploration – ways in which to evidence increased footfall, enhanced street scene, changes in perceptions and reaching new audiences.
- Balancing quick interventions with ambition. The most impactful models are not a **quick fix**, requiring time to develop and **upfront seed funding** to secure the capacity, specialist creative expertise and assets needed to be investment-ready. **All partners** need to pool financial or in-kind support in order to make initiatives a reality.
- **Retail spaces** remain an area needing further exploration. Office buildings are easier to work with in the short term as identifying and **reaching landlords** of retail spaces is a challenge, requiring further time and resource (particularly as many are located overseas). Some landlords also remained confident that commercial occupiers would present themselves despite the pandemic.



For further queries

If you're interested in being part of the City Vistas programme, please contact
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Culture & Commerce Taskforce

