



HEART
OF LONDON
BUSINESS
ALLIANCE



SPOTLIGHT ON THE WEST END

UNLEASHING GROWTH THROUGH
LONDON'S EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

The West End

Headlining London's Experience Economy

The West End is one of London's greatest assets – a globally recognised cultural destination that fuels the city's economy through its unique blend of commerce and experiences. As a vital economic and cultural powerhouse, it is central to achieving the London Growth Plan's Experience Economy ambitions.

Home to over 61,000 businesses¹ generating £55.5 billion in annual GVA (£9 billion in Evening and Night-time Economy ENTE sectors)², the West End needs strategic investment, forward-thinking policy support, and a unified approach to long-term place-based growth to remain competitive. As a custodian of this ecosystem, the Heart of London Business Alliance (HOLBA) plays a crucial role in bringing together businesses, property owners, investors, and policymakers to unlock new opportunities and ensuring the West End continues to thrive as a major contributor to both London and the UK's prosperity.

Strategic partnerships are central to securing the West End's future. The Greater London Authority (GLA) and Westminster City Council play crucial roles in shaping planning, licensing, and investment policies that directly impact businesses in the West End. And, Transport for London (TfL) is essential to improving accessibility and ensuring the area remains a seamless, well-connected destination for workers, visitors, and residents across the 24-hour economic cycle. Additionally, working closely with the Metropolitan Police is vital to maintaining safety, ensuring the West End remains a secure and welcoming environment for all.

In support of the London Growth Plan and the forthcoming London Plan, this case study explores the West End's impact, the challenges it faces, and the critical steps required to secure its vibrant future. It highlights the importance of the Experience Economy in shaping the district's evolution, featuring insights from key stakeholders and strategic recommendations to invigorate forward growth.

¹ ONS Crown Copyright Reserved, UK Business Counts, 2024

² ONS 2022, using 3 best-fit LSOAs and GLA ENTE SIC07 group definitions 2021.

³ HOLBA Footfall, Core West End geography, Sum of Unique Daily Visits, November 2023 - October 2024.

Note: The London Growth Plan refers to Experience Economy as tradeable activities in culture, events, sports, attractions, retail and hospitality. In 2018, the Greater London Authority defined the Evening and Night-time Economy (ENTE) as a collection of 32 SIC07 groups related to culture, leisure, health and personal social services.



“The West End is an economic and cultural powerhouse that has driven London's success for generations. Yet, its continued prosperity cannot be assumed—it must be actively nurtured, championed, and protected. As custodians of this extraordinary place, we are committed to securing the investment, innovation, coordination, and policy support needed to sustain and enhance its status as a world-leading destination. The West End is not just a cornerstone of London's economy; it is a national asset that requires long-term vision and collaborative leadership to ensure it thrives for decades to come.”

Ros Morgan
Chief Executive
Heart of London Business Alliance



“London's Experience Economy is a key driver of growth, shaping our global reputation and sustaining jobs across culture, hospitality, retail, and entertainment. The West End sits at the heart of this ecosystem, attracting investment, fostering innovation, and reinforcing London's position as a world-leading destination.

The London Growth Plan recognises the Experience Economy's role in driving economic resilience and international competitiveness. To secure its future, we must support businesses with the right policies, investment in infrastructure, and a long-term vision for sustainable growth.

The Heart of London Business Alliance (HOLBA) plays a vital role in championing the West End's success. Their leadership brings together businesses, investors, and policymakers to unlock opportunities, tackle challenges, and ensure the West End remains a thriving engine of economic and cultural activity.

The West End's success is London's success. By working in partnership, we can strengthen this vital district, creating a more dynamic, inclusive, and competitive city for generations to come.”

Howard Dawber
Deputy Mayor
Business & Growth, Greater London Authority



Enabling Success: What West End Businesses Need to Thrive

From global entertainment brands to independent businesses, these HOLBA member spotlights represent a cross-section of the West End's economic ecosystem, offering insights into both the **opportunities** and **barriers** facing the district today. Their experiences highlight important themes for securing the West End's future prosperity.

"The West End thrives on delivering world-class experiences, but that experience must start the moment visitors arrive in the district. **If the streets feel unsafe, poorly lit, or neglected**, it undermines the premium offering we and others work so hard to provide. Ensuring a consistently high-quality environment is not just about perception—it's essential for protecting businesses, attracting investment, and keeping the West End competitive on the global stage."

Simon Thomas
Executive Chairman, The Hippodrome Casino

"The West End is a top shopping destination for tourists visiting London, but it competes with other European capitals to attract tourists ready to spend. **Reinstating tax free shopping** for international visitors would give London back its edge, helping small businesses maintain their presence and continue to thrive in the West End."

Lalage Beaumont
Owner, Lalage Beaumont

"The West End is a globally unique collection of cultural and heritage assets that requires careful place-stewardship. We need smart investment in infrastructure, public spaces, and policies to attract tenants and support continuous innovation of our asset base, **including a more flexible planning approach to grade-listed buildings**. Asset owners' long-term commitment can be encouraged by collaboration across businesses, policymakers, and investors to derisk the future and keep the West End dynamic and resilient."

Adam Wiles
London Estate Director, Gascoyne Estates

"HOLBA plays a crucial role in ensuring that the ecosystem around us thrives, going beyond individual businesses to facilitate a world-class destination that continues to innovate and attract audiences from around the world."

M Morishita & T Nakamura
Co-CEO, Japan Centre

The West End is home to over 61,000 businesses that define its unique character and drive its economic success. Addressing key challenges will be central to unlocking another decade of growth.

"The West End's hotels are a cornerstone of its global appeal, offering world-class hospitality to millions of visitors. However, **restrictive planning and licensing frameworks can be challenging for expansion and innovation**. To remain competitive, we need a more flexible and responsive system that supports investment, enables growth, and reflects the evolving needs of modern hospitality."

Bev King
Chief Executive, Z Hotels

"The magic of the West End lies in its unparalleled ability to offer diverse and immersive experiences, all within footsteps of each other. **However, the current business rates framework (and proposed changes by the Government) poses a serious threat for the growth of immersive experiences like the Crystal Maze**. To unlock the full potential of the West End, we must push for a fairer, more equitable business rates system that supports the growth of immersive entertainment through targeted relief measures."

Tom Lionetti-Maguire
CEO and Founder of Little Lion Entertainment (Crystal Maze)

"The West End's unique offer is at the heart of London's international visitor draw but **quickly losing its commercial edge due to unjustified business rate rises and against competing European cities which offer attractive VAT refund policies**. We need action to support the multi-generational small businesses which are part of the West End's historic legacy as well as its experienced springboard for continual innovation."

Richard Harvie
Director, Harvie & Hudson, Jermyn Street, St James's

"London's West End has always been at the forefront of creativity and entertainment, and we're thrilled to see so much excitement from audiences, and the desire for more shows, later hours and new events. **Privately-led cultural institutions need the right regulatory environment to help us continue to recover from the financial impacts of COVID** and ensure that the West End's cultural scene keeps thriving."

William Differ
Chief Operating Officer, Delfont Mackintosh Theatres

The West End

Shaping a Global Hub for Commerce & Experience

The London Growth Plan presents an opportunity for the West End to reinforce its position as a critical driver of London's economy, blending commerce, culture, and entertainment to create a world-class destination. To maintain its global leadership, a unique place-based pro-growth strategy focused on investment, policy alignment, and business support must be implemented.



At the heart of the West End lies an opportunity to redefine how central London is shaped, governed and experienced. The proposed International Centre for Commerce and Experience (ICCE) is more than a policy designation - it is a transformative, future-ready model designed to safeguard, strengthen, and scale the unique cultural and commercial assets that make the Heart of London a global beacon. ICCE is built on three interdependent pillars:

Enabling Growth in the West End

Positioned at the cultural and commercial heart of London – and of the world – the West End is unlike anywhere else. Its success demands a bespoke approach, not a one-size-fits-all model. A bespoke and strategic emphasis on culture, commerce and experience can unlock investment, align with the London Growth Plan and Westminster's Local Plans, and drive inclusive growth that ripples across the capital and the UK.

Commerce

forms the West End's economic backbone. The retail, hospitality, and entertainment industries generate billions in revenue, sustain thousands of jobs, and attract millions of visitors each year. Major investors and property owners play a crucial role in evolving this commercial landscape, while emerging sectors – such as digital and experiential retail – offer new investment opportunities.



Place Enablers

such as coordinated place-based management, enhanced connectivity, resilient infrastructure, and exceptional public realm define destinations that attract investment and grow patronage.

Experience

is what sets the West End apart. Cultural and creative industries, from world-famous theatres to galleries and live entertainment venues, define its global appeal. Investment in public spaces, pedestrian-friendly initiatives, and event activations enhance the visitor experience, while digital and AI-driven innovations elevate engagement, customer interactions, and business operations.



Policy Alignment

Embed West End lessons learned into the UK's industrial strategy for the Experience Economy, serving as an exemplar for national growth through creativity, culture, and experience sectors.



Policy Differentiation

Advocate for sensitively tailored planning, licensing, and investment policies that derisk, promote, and allow innovation of 24-hour experience economy uses, plus authority and autonomy to deliver against these policies.



Coordinated Place Management

Lead an ongoing multi-stakeholder process to better coordinate the delivery of infrastructure and public services in line with our climate goals to enable positive place-based experiences for visitors and businesses.



Responsive Resourcing

Provide financial and personnel resource that matches the scale of the West End's place-management challenges and its significant contribution on London's economic growth.

The 24-hour Experience Economy Ecosystem

Unlocking Place-based Management in London's West End

The West End is a complex and dynamic mix of businesses, residents, and visitors, requiring coordination and leadership to create one of the world's preeminent experience districts.

¹HOLBA Place Performance Evidence Base, Core West End & HOL Area geographies, June 2022 - May 2024.
²ONS 2022, using 13 best-fit LSOAs and DCMS ENTE sector definitions 2021.



Who is the custodian of the West End experience?

The West End has long been a success story, but without targeted intervention, it risks stagnation in an increasingly competitive global landscape. To unlock its full potential, regulatory, economic, and structural challenges must be addressed through a coordinated, pro-growth strategy that supports businesses, attracts investment, and enhances London's global competitiveness.



The ICCE Framework A New Model for Managing the 24-hour Experience Economy

Managing a district as complex and high-profile as the West End requires a flexible, bespoke model that can respond to its unique challenges and scale. HOLBA's ICCE framework – an **International Centre for Commerce and Experience** could:

Ensure investment in public realm and infrastructure to enhance visitor experience and business confidence.

Deliver policy reforms that support the Experience Economy, enabling businesses to grow and innovate.

Recognise the West End as a strategic economic and cultural asset that requires tailored governance and investment.

What could ICCE unlock?

Delivering Experience Economy Growth

As a long-standing engine for London's growth and a global exemplar for the experience economy, the West End is uniquely positioned to achieve the ambitions laid out in the London Growth Plan, particularly with a commitment to the plan's partnership priorities of foundations, freedom, and funding.

Foundations

The West End has the fundamental underpinnings – heritage assets, globally recognised cultural institutions, and distinct creative sector ecosystem – to accelerate growth of the UK's experience economy. Delivering on this potential requires a leadership mandate to coordinate diverse partnerships across public and private sectors, the development of a bespoke and holistic place-based plan for growth, and the governance capacity to put innovation into action. It is upon these foundations that the West End can transform current potential into future growth.

Freedom

Tailored policy that is both responsive and resilient to the West End's unique footfall conditions, distinct economic mix, and the rapid evolution of experience economy businesses is essential to unlocking London's next decade of growth in this sector. Freedom to innovate policy alongside the experience economy's rapid evolution enables balancing the complex considerations of heritage, licensing, business rates, transport, and other ingredients in ways that accelerate growth and differentiation of the UK's global experience offer.

Funding

Already a premier destination within London, the West End can experience footfall surges of more than 300%, highlighting the need for funding at scale to address significant area-based management challenges of a globally recognised destination district. Turning these challenges into growth drivers requires durable investment in policing, infrastructure, and other place enablers commensurate with the footfall and economic activity the district contributes to London.

Ramadan Festival Lights, creating more diverse and accessible public realm experiences in the West End

Place-Specific Governance

A Special Policy Area designation could enhance authority, autonomy, and coordination to align stakeholders, streamline planning, and implement place-specific solutions that reflect the scale of the West End's bespoke needs.

Safety & Responsibility

More coordinated delivery of public services, including safety, visitor experience, and business security.

Public Realm Investment

Enhanced streetscapes, lighting, and wayfinding to ensure a world-class visitor experience.

ICCE could unlock

Business Readiness

Business support for navigating digital transformation, sustainability targets, and transport access challenges.



HATCH

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