

WOMEN'S

SHARE

ALDIT



Publica

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Executive Summary

The small and self-selecting sample of ten women included in the study drew attention to the sheer volume of everyday inconveniences, safety considerations, behaviour changes and experiences of sexual harassment and assault that women in London must navigate daily. We heard of instances of stalking and flashing. Women recounted walking as fast as they could to an Underground station and avoiding green spaces after dark. We heard many stories of participants taking longer routes home, having partners meet them off the bus, avoiding being out alone past 7pm, calling parents on their way home and downloading safety apps to share their real-time locations with loved ones. We heard of men underplaying women's fears and doubting their experiences and laughing at a sexual harassment awareness-raising campaign on public transport. These stories, experiences and histories were summed up simply by one participant in this study saying she had had

“so many instances of sexual assault”.

Victoria is one of central London's largest opportunity areas and fastest changing neighbourhoods with new development bringing jobs, commercial activity, an emerging economy at night and new leisure uses. The train station is one of London's busiest and is a key connector to southwest London while the bus station is London's regional bus terminus. The wider area houses distinct neighbourhoods with residential amenities, community spaces and significant cultural venues and institutions. Many people work, pass through or visit the area at night and the London Heritage Quarter is looking to

support strategies to ensure the safety of women who are in the area at night. The recommendations in this report relate to the Victoria area and the findings from two workshops with a cohort of ten women. Although specific to the local context, the recommendations outline potential actions that could be taken across the London Heritage Quarter area. Many require close working with partners and some of the actions could be delivered by strategic authorities such as Westminster City Council, Transport for London (TfL) or the Greater London Authority (GLA) and lobbied for in Westminster and London more generally.

Sir Mark Rowley, the Met Police Commissioner, recently described violence against women and girls as *“endemic and systemic”* and offered that

“if we really, nationally and in London, will have the scale of response that the threat to women and children from predatory men deserves, it will need a massively upscaled approach across multiple agencies”.

This report makes the case for what some of these approaches might look like in a defined area of central London and lobbies for the type of multi-agency intervention called for by the Met Police Commissioner. As well as outlining what London Heritage Quarter could do, there are recommendations for the local authority, regional transport authority, businesses and landowners.



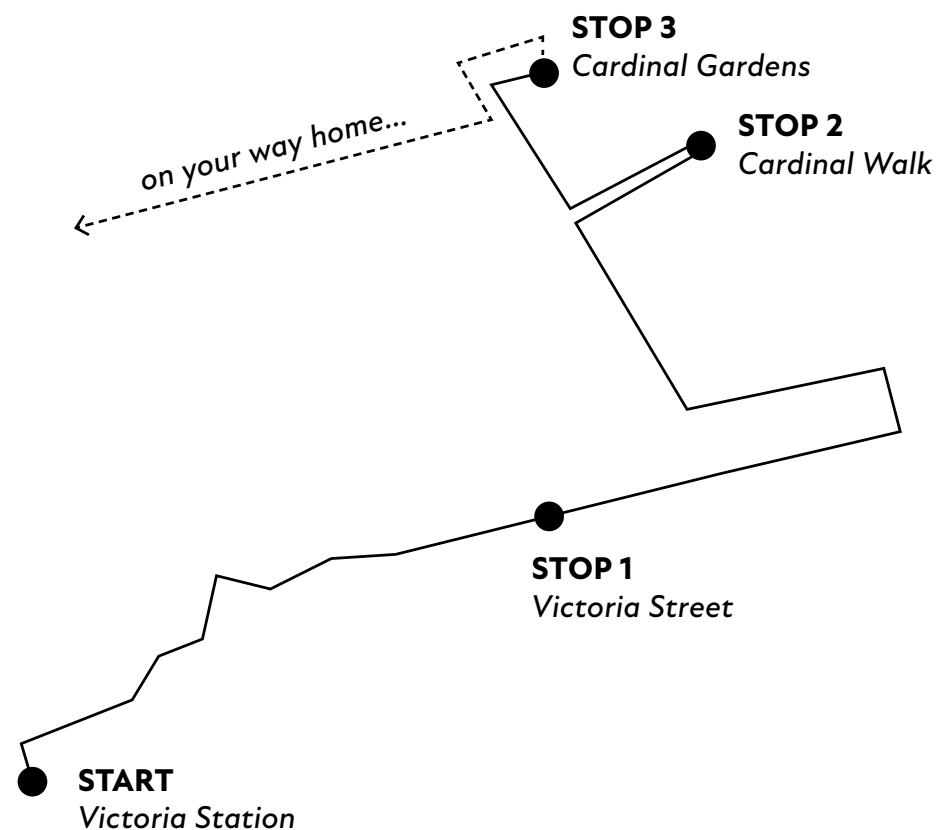
Introduction

Publica was commissioned by the London Heritage Quarter to conduct participant-led and exploratory research to understand women's safety experiences at night in the Victoria area. Through a series of body mapping exercises and workshops, the report identifies a set of practical recommendations for the London Heritage Quarter and their partners to enhance safety experiences in the area at night. This report represents a first step and the ideas and proposals within it will need to be discussed and worked through with other teams within the BID and with external partners to identify what is deliverable in the short, medium and long-term.

The report begins by setting out the research methodology and findings from the two workshops before outlining suggested actions to address women's safety concerns.

The findings and recommendations have been organised into the following six themes:

1. Visible sense of community
2. Safety narratives
3. Security
4. Informal safety signals
5. Road safety and transport
6. Public realm design, lighting and greening



Map of the body mapping exercise.



What I like about this space...

idea
→ improvement
→ the entrance
to 64 victoria
street →
gives me a marked
that I can

Methodology

Body mapping is a research method that recognises the body as the site of gender-based violence. It acknowledges and draws on the fact that the experiences of safety, or the inverse experiences of danger and discomfort in public spaces, are felt and embodied as emotions, sensations and feelings such as shortness of breath, anxiety, elevated heart rates or clenched fists for example. The method supports participants to communicate emotions that may be difficult to verbalise and provides visual representations of how people feel and subjectively experience a space. The method invites participants to draw their feelings and experiences onto an outline that represent their bodies.

The participatory research took place over the course of two workshops in early October 2024 with a cohort of ten women. Participants were recruited through newsletters, social media posts and local community organisations and represented workers, residents and visitors to the Victoria area.

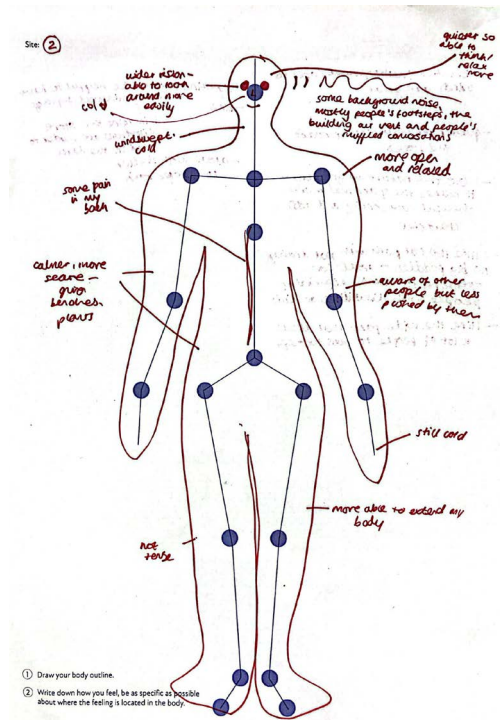
The first workshop used body mapping as a method to audit the Victoria area in the evening and night time. Participants were invited to map their emotional and physical responses to two sites in Victoria as they moved through the area. Participants were given a brief introduction to the project and task before being invited to record and draw a body map as they walked from Terminus Place outside Victoria Station along Victoria Street to Wilcox Place. Participants were then asked to perform the same exercise in Cardinal Walk before taking part in a short workshop and discussion in Cardinal Gardens. The first workshop ended with instructions to conduct a final body map

of their journeys home and to reflect on their safety experiences as they moved through and left the London Heritage Quarter area at night.

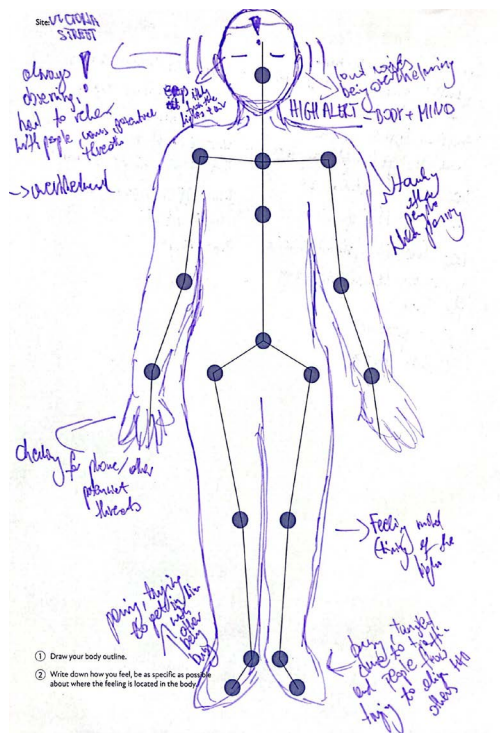
The method was chosen for its potential to elicit detailed and personal reflections about how the design, management and condition of a public space makes women feel with regards to their perception of safety, belonging and comfort. The body maps drawn by participants were used as tools to facilitate discussions, identify commonalities between participants and unpick contrasting and contradictory safety experiences. Participants were also asked to identify things they liked in the public realm as well as things they would like to see more of.

The experiences of participants were grouped thematically and the themes and findings from the first workshop were discussed in greater depth a week later in a more traditional roundtable setting. The second workshop invited the cohort of participants to share the body maps of their journeys home before refining the key themes and co-developing a long-list of recommendations to address the issues identified through the research. These recommendations were voted on and further refined into a set of potential actions for the London Heritage Quarter and partners.

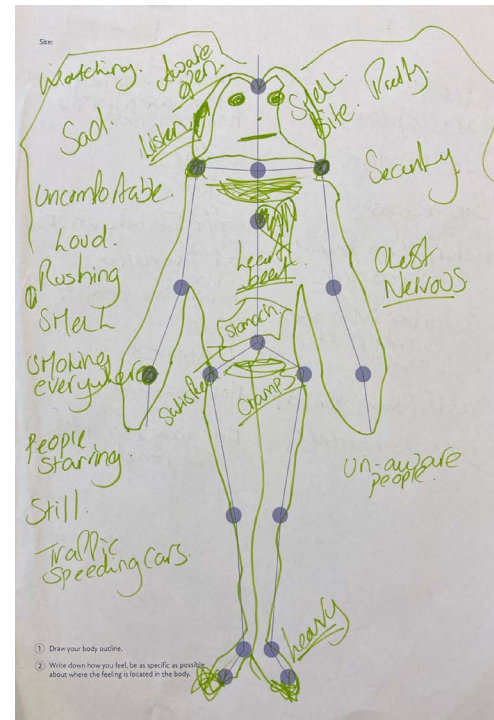
Participant 1 body map for Cardinal Walk.



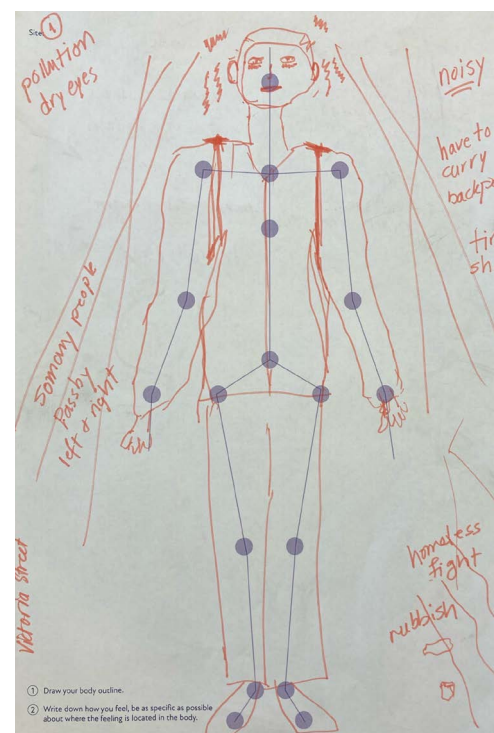
Participant 2 body map for Victoria Street

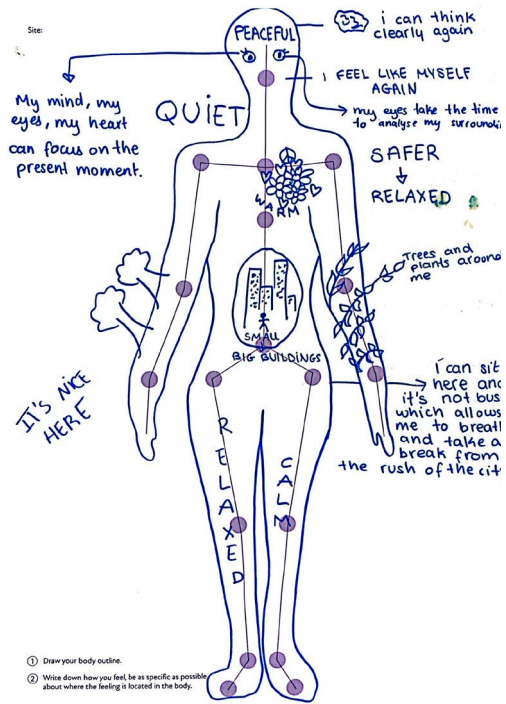


Participant 3 body map for Victoria Street

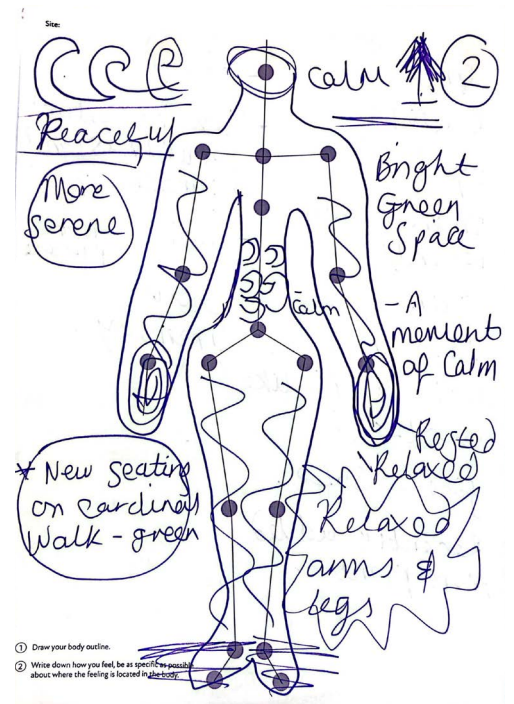


Participant 4 body map for Victoria Street

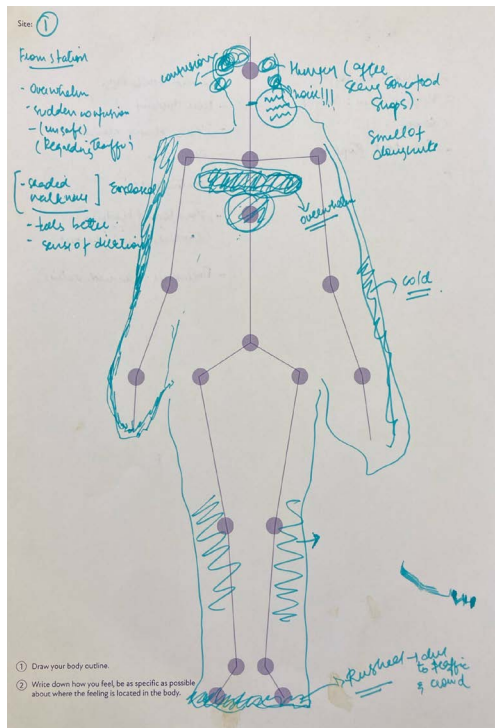




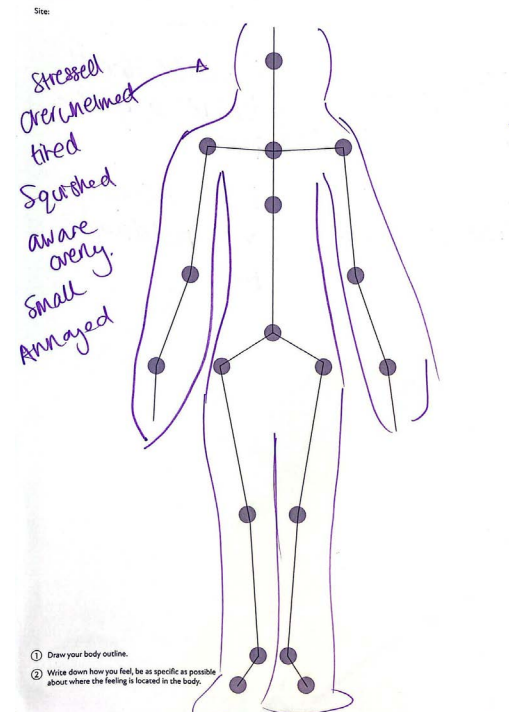
Participant 5 body map for Cardinal Walk



Participant 7 body map for Cardinal Walk

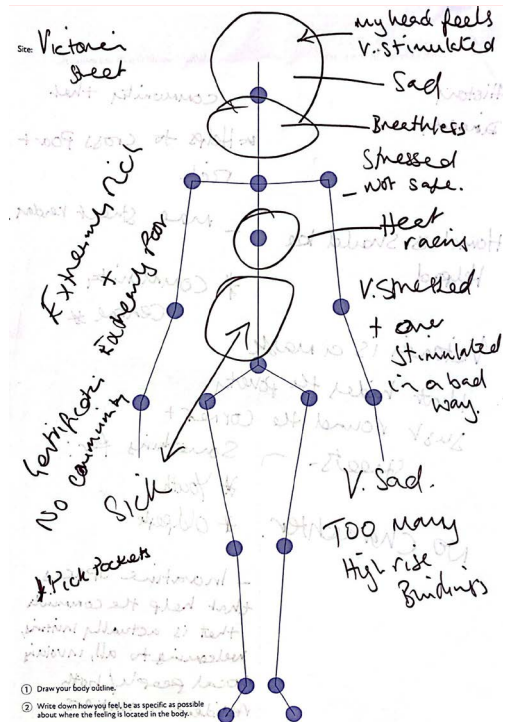


Participant 6 body map for Victoria Street

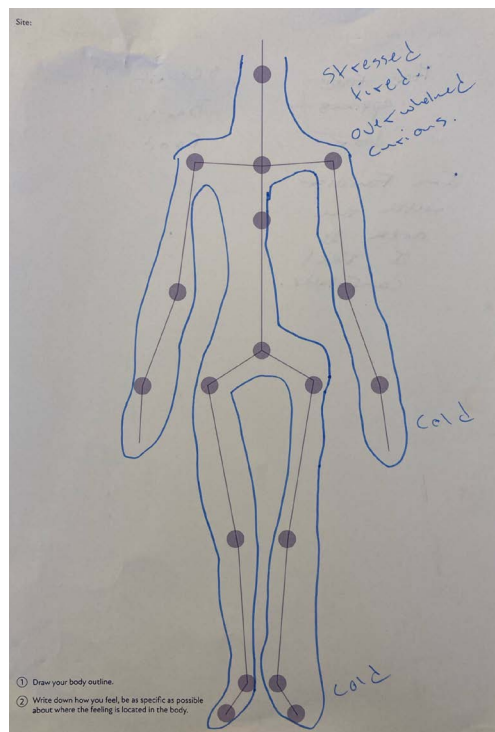


Participant 8 body map for Victoria Street

Participant 9 body map for Victoria Street



Participant 10 body map for Victoria Street





Key Themes

The findings from the two workshops were collated, coded and analysed to develop eight key themes. These were presented to participants to comment on and refine.

1. Visible sense of community

One of the key contrasts drawn between Victoria Street and Cardinal Place was the sense of there being a local residential community that uses Cardinal Place as opposed to the feeling that Victoria Street is a thoroughfare for commuters and workers. Participants noticed people walking slower, friendship groups meeting and after-work activities such as running taking place in these spaces just off Victoria Street. The area felt less like somewhere to pass by in a hurry and instead was a place to meet, dwell, rest and socialise. However, some participants contradicted this sentiment by describing Cardinal Walk as “*soulless*” in part due to the architecture, scale of the buildings and exclusive and corporate feel of the space.

Victoria Street was described as a place “*with no community*” despite the large number of local residents and densely populated neighbourhoods, particularly to the south of Victoria Street. This was framed by one participant as “*Plenty of people live here but you don’t feel it*”. Another participant further reflected that they would like to see more young people and older people out in public and promote more community activity and more community spaces in the area. They added that:

“There is no space for young people and the elderly”.

This sense of a lack of community was further exacerbated by the presence of homeless people who act as a stark

reminder of the extreme inequalities in London and in the area in particular. The presence of this uncared-for and vulnerable population prompted participants to share their sadness and physical sickness at the sight of such disparities and poverty in a wealthy part of London. Participants wanted to see much more support for people experiencing homelessness.

Recommendations

- 1.1** Create opportunities for women in the area to meet by convening a women’s network or supporting women’s groups in the area and signposting people to these services.
- 1.2** Organise and offer free women’s self-defence classes.
- 1.3** Organise or support activities for women in the evening such as running groups to increase the visible participation of women in public spaces after dark.
- 1.4** Provide support for people experiencing homelessness. This includes suggestions to host meals in the public realm, promote food donations from businesses, reduce food waste, establish pay-it-forward schemes or a community kitchen and support food banks to more clearly show support and voluntary community action.

2. Safety narratives

Throughout the two workshops, participants cited occurrences of crimes that had taken place in the area as key determinants of their behaviours and safety experiences. Stories of colleagues getting their phones stolen on Victoria Street or phones getting snatched on Oxford Street made participants feel like *“this could happen anywhere”* and made them reluctant to take their phones out to look for directions, text friends and family or unlock dockless bikes when alone in the area. During one of the body mapping exercises along Victoria Street, a participant described *“checking for my phone and other potential threats”* as they walked through the street and another noted *“pickpockets”* as something on her mind during the walk while another said,

“I feel unsafe because of pickpockets”.

Knowledge about local incidents and information about crime in the area was seen as both a useful resource but also a contributor to feelings of anxiety. This was summarised by a participant who said,

“I am part of a WhatsApp group locally that shares local stories of street robberies and harassment. I am glad to know what is going on but it also makes me feel really anxious to hear all of these stories”.

This was echoed by another participant claiming that *“The stories of muggings in the area means I add a lens to my experience on the street and my perceptions of danger”.*

This heightened sense of alertness was echoed by most participants on Victoria Street with many people finding the space overwhelming and overstimulating due to loud noises and fast-moving

people and traffic. Participants described experiences such as elevated heart rates, breathlessness, anxious stomachs, racing minds, an inability to relax, darting and dry eyes, tiredness and irritability due to this environment. Despite the busyness of the area, and the passive surveillance and overlooking other people provide, the space made participants feel alienated, alone, invisible and stressed with one participant describing the space as unsafe as a result of these experiences.

The workshop explored opportunities to counteract these perceptions of Victoria Street and draw attention to positive experiences of the area. There were suggestions that greenery could soften the landscape and bring a human scale to an area with many tall buildings that made one participant feel *“small and invisible”*.

Recommendations

2.1 Use public art, murals, lighting installations or community greening projects to bring more colour to the public realm, celebrate local women or draw attention to local histories of women.

2.2 Provide free bystander intervention training for people that work in the area to ensure that when incidents do occur, bystanders are empowered to intervene and challenge behaviours and provide support to women.

3. Security

Across the two workshops, the presence of regular, visible and well-trained security emerged as a key concern. It was recognised that the London Heritage Quarter provides regular patrols along Victoria Street but participants felt that more could be done by these teams to steward and manage the public realm by, for example, supporting homeless people who may be in distress or may be in vulnerable situations. During the public realm audit in Victoria Street, participants reflected on a scene they witnessed where an argument between two people who appeared to be homeless was ignored by security staff as they walked by despite the potential risk posed to one of the people in the altercation. There was a suggestion that security staff could be trained to better support in these types of situations.

Participants were aware of the fragmented land ownership and various management regimes in the area and were unsure if the London Heritage Quarter security presence extended to the Cardinal Place development. Some participants expressed a desire to have more opportunities to directly contact the security staff in case of an emergency through displayed signage with numbers to call or text or dedicated contact points similar to ones found in transport hubs. These contact points could also provide medical equipment in case of emergencies. One participant reflected that in the past, ambulances and other emergency services had been slow to respond to people who appeared unconscious in the street while intoxicated or under the influence of drugs and participants would like more dedicated resources in the area to address

these situations when they occur and support people in need.

Recommendations

3.1 Invest in and lobby for additional security presence in the public realm, in train stations and on trains at night.

3.2 Explore strategies to deter and discourage anti-social behaviour such as street pastors or other voluntary schemes such as the Westminster Night Stars. Participants also suggested installing signs to draw attention to existing CCTV infrastructure or finding opportunities to display live feeds from CCTV on trains to strengthen the effectiveness of these deterrent measures.

3.3 Invest in signs, awareness campaigns or contact points to enable people in the public realm to directly contact security teams such as the London Heritage Quarter street security teams or private security employed by LandSec.

3.4 Share better information about schemes such as Ask for Angela and Safe Havens and further roll-out of schemes.



4. Informal safety signals

Many participants pointed to some of the informal signals and cues in the public realm that shaped their perceptions of safety. These included the presence of seating, colourful planters, greenery, people dwelling and well-maintained public spaces. These features were almost unanimously brought up as positive things about Cardinal Walk with seating in particular highlighted as something missing along Victoria Street (although one participant countered that even if there was seating, the area would remain uncomfortable to dwell in due to the overstimulating nature of the environment, the presence of so many people and the sense of ill-ease she described when she was alone and approached by homeless people).

Many of the factors that contribute to a feeling of safety in public are non-spatial and do not employ security technologies or infrastructure. For example, one participant stated that they felt safer when they saw another woman on their own in the dark, stating,

“If they can be here at night, so can I”.

Some commercial premises were also recognised for the role they play in supporting a safe public realm. Retailers in particular were mentioned as contributing positively to public safety when they open late, provide some light spill onto footways and maintain active frontages at night. Retailers were seen as potential premises to take shelter in, seek support or contact emergency services in case of an incident.

One participant noted that the increasing number of night time venues in Victoria

were improving safety in the area at night. These businesses, such as the new bowling alley, darts and sports bars and restaurants, brought additional footfall to the area after dark and increased the number of staff in these venues that could play a supporting role in the stewardship of the public realm at night.

Conversely, other businesses were mentioned as places people did not feel safe in such as McDonald’s and Itsu on Victoria Street. The covered street where these businesses are located contributed to a feeling of enclosure and poor lighting after dark and participants recounted witnessing altercations outside these premises.

Recommendations

4.1 Support a wider range of businesses to open later such as retailers through small grants to host events or sharing footfall data to make the case to open later.

4.2 Provide access to phone chargers in businesses and in public spaces. Where possible, make these facilities free and locate them in busy spaces that are overlooked and well-lit.

5. Road Safety and transport

The impact of the road network on safety was consistently referenced. Framed in terms of physical safety, participants felt that the noise, pollution and dangers from speeding traffic contributed to an unsafe environment. In particular, several participants referenced recent incidents of bus collisions with pedestrians along Wilton Road as buses exit Terminus Place. One participant noted that they were aware of the *“Danger of buses as two women have been injured in the last five years with no real action taken to prevent this in the future”*. The pedestrian connection from the back of the Market Halls across Terminus Place to Victoria Station and the taxi rank was also identified as a dangerous pedestrian route:

“It is dangerous to leave the Market Halls and cross bus lanes to reach taxi rank”.

There was a desire for more pedestrian crossings along Victoria Street and traffic calming measures, such as zebra crossings, speed cameras, roadside planting or changes to the road layout to improve pedestrian safety and comfort. People wanted greater separation from traffic to lessen the noise and nuisance caused by speeding traffic in the area. Most participants appreciated the wider pavements along Victoria Street and any interventions should not reduce pavement widths.

Recommendations

5.1 Lobby for traffic calming measures on Victoria street including additional crossings, traffic lights and speed cameras.

5.2 Work with network rail and TFL to rationalise and improve the bus station and taxi rank outside Victoria Station on Terminus Place to improve pedestrian safety.

5.3 Lobby for extensions to the Night Tube to cover additional lines and additional days to support night workers.

6. Public Realm Design, Lighting and Greenery

The area was described as confusing to navigate and unwelcoming for first-time visitors. This contributes to feeling unsafe and disorientated. Road names are not visible and some transport interchanges, from the Underground to a bus or the Victoria Coach Station, for example, are complicated to navigate. The London Heritage Quarter maps and visitor information points and guides were recognised as valuable contributions to this issue but participants suggested extending wayfinding interventions such as these into the wider area.

One of the positive characteristics of the area described by participants was the number and scale of large open spaces. This was contrasted to the City of London or the West End with the square outside Westminster Cathedral identified as a particularly valuable piece of public realm with opportunities to enhance the space with additional seating and greening. Participants noted and appreciated the ample seating, colourful planting and planters in Cardinal Walk and would like to see more colour and improvements to other public spaces in the area. There was also a call for additional lighting to the covered colonnade on the south side of Victoria Street as this space feels darker and less hospitable. Participants suggested a special lighting treatment for key routes and arteries in the area as this could help with wayfinding.

Recommendations

- 6.1 Develop a strategic lighting masterplan to identify a hierarchy of routes at night and develop place-specific lighting treatments for key routes, architectural features and landmarks.
- 6.2 Improve wayfinding in the area further by signposting and lighting key landmarks and better directing people to destinations.
- 6.3 Invest in lighting improvements to the colonnade on Victoria Street.
- 6.4 Provide additional planting and greenery on Victoria Street.



Recommendation	Short/medium/long-term	Partners	Low/medium/high priority
1. Visible sense of community			
1.1 Create opportunities for women in the area to meet by convening a women's network or supporting women's groups in the area and signposting people to these services.	Medium	Victoria Neighbourhood Forum and charitable organisations	Low
1.2 Organise and offer free women's self-defence classes.	Medium	Local businesses and charitable organisations	High
1.3 Organise or support activities for women in the evening such as running groups to increase the visible participation of women in public spaces after dark.	Medium	Victoria Neighbourhood Forum and charitable organisations	Low
1.4 Provide support for people experiencing homelessness. This includes suggestions to host meals in the public realm, promote food donations from businesses, reduce food waste, establish pay-it-forward schemes or a community kitchen and support food banks to more clearly show support and voluntary community action.	Medium	Local businesses and charitable organisations	Medium
2. Safety narratives			
2.1 Use public art, murals, lighting installations or community greening projects to bring more colour to the public realm, celebrate local women or draw attention to local histories of women.	Medium	Local businesses, developers, TfL, WCC	Medium
2.2 Provide free bystander intervention training for people that work in the area to ensure that when incidents do occur, bystanders are empowered to intervene and challenge behaviours and provide support to women.	Medium	Local businesses and charitable organisations	High
3. Security			
3.1 Invest in and lobby for additional security presence in the public realm, in train stations and on trains at night.	Long	Network Rail, TfL, Met Police, BTP	Low
3.2 Explore strategies to deter and discourage anti-social behaviour such as street pastors or other voluntary schemes such as the Westminster Night Stars. Participants also suggested installing signs to draw attention to existing CCTV infrastructure or finding opportunities to display live feeds from CCTV on trains to strengthen the effectiveness of these deterrent measures.	Long	WCC, charitable organisations, local businesses	High
3.3 Invest in signs, awareness campaigns or contact points to enable people in the public realm to directly contact security teams such as the London Heritage Quarter street security teams or private security employed by LandSec.	Long	Local landowners, local businesses	Low
3.4 Share better information about schemes such as Ask for Angela and Safe Havens and further roll-out these schemes.	Short	Local businesses and WCC	High

4. Informal safety signals			
4.1 Support a wider range of businesses to open later such as retailers through small grants to host events or sharing footfall data to make the case to open later.	Long	Local businesses, WCC	Medium
4.2 Provide access to phone chargers in businesses and in public spaces. Where possible, make these facilities free and locate them in busy spaces that are overlooked and well-lit.	Medium	Local businesses	Medium
5. Road safety and transport			
5.1 Lobby for traffic calming measures on Victoria street including additional crossings, traffic lights and speed cameras.	Long	WCC, TfL	High
5.2 Work with Network Rail and TfL to rationalise and improve the bus station and taxi rank outside Vitoria Station on Terminus Place to improve pedestrian safety.	Long	Network Rail, TfL, WCC	High
5.3 Lobby for extensions to the Night Tube to cover additional lines and additional days to support night workers.	Long	GLA, TfL	Low
6. Public realm design, lighting and greening			
6.1 Develop a strategic lighting masterplan to identify a hierarchy of routes at night and develop place-specific lighting treatments for key routes, architectural features and landmarks.	Medium	Local businesses, local landowners	High
6.2 Improve wayfinding in the area further by signposting and lighting key landmarks and better directing people to destinations.	Short	Local businesses, local landowners, TfL, WCC	High
6.3 Invest in lighting improvements to the colonnade on Victoria Street.	Medium	Local landowners, TfL, WCC	Medium
6.4 Provide additional planting and greenery on Victoria Street.	Medium	Local landowners, TfL, WCC	Low

Thanks and acknowledgments

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