

AFTER DARK REPORT & ACTIONS



Prepared by Six Till Six for
London Heritage Quarter

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Executive Summary

London Heritage Quarter (LHQ) commissioned leading hospitality consultancy Six Till Six to identify and address challenges and opportunities in the night-time economy (NTE).

Comprehensive research was undertaken with 78 BID levy-paying businesses between November 2023 and February 2024.

The findings have been used to develop a series of suggested actions grouped thematically as follows:

1. **Business Support:** Addressing operational challenges including recruitment, retention and cost management.
2. **Encouraging Consumer Spend:** Driving footfall, promoting cultural and leisure offerings and supporting events.
3. **Being Safe, Feeling Safe:** Enhancing perceptions and realities of safety through training, technology and partnerships.

The proposed actions aim to ensure that LHQ becomes a thriving, safe and welcoming destination during the evening and at night.

They are designed to be able to connect into the After Dark strategy being launched by Westminster City Council in 2025, and sit alongside the recommendations following the Women's Safety Audit carried out by Publica earlier in 2024.

Introduction

London Heritage Quarter (LHQ) encompasses four key areas: Victoria, North Bank, Victoria Westminster and Whitehall. As part of its commitment to enhancing the night-time economy, LHQ engaged Six Till Six to research and develop an action plan to improve safety and support local businesses.

Objectives

- To understand the challenges faced by night-time economy businesses.
- To identify opportunities for improvement and growth.
- To develop an action plan to support safety, footfall and business sustainability.

Timeline

1. **November 2023 - January 2024:** Research with BID levy-paying businesses.
2. **February 2024:** Presentation of findings at a levy payer and partner event.
3. **September 2024:** Stakeholder workshop to finalise the action plan.

This research project was commissioned alongside a Women's Safety Audit conducted by Publica. This report's findings and recommendations will complement those of the audit.

It was commissioned at the same time as Westminster City Council's development of the After Dark Night Time Strategy. London HQ, Westminster City Council and Six Till Six collaborated during the action development phase to identify opportunities for aligning London HQ's initiatives with the After Dark Strategy.

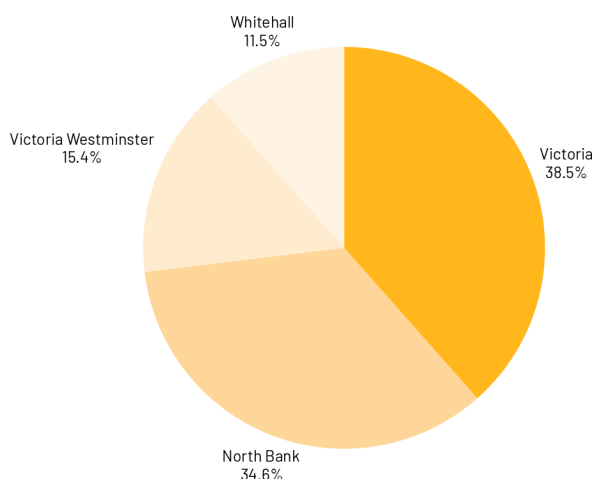
Findings: Demographics

The research captured 78 input from a variety of business types, providing a representative view of the night-time economy in the area. The research interviews were carried out through face-to-face visits by Six Till Six. Some demographic information of respondents is provided below.

Business type	No. respondents	% respondents
Pub	34	43.6%
Restaurant	22	
Bar	9	11.5%
Hotel	6	7.7%
Theatre, Supermarket	2 each	2.6% each
Cafe, nightclub, other	1 each	1.3% each

Number of businesses interviewed in each location

Victoria: 30
North Bank: 22
Victoria Westminster: 12
Whitehall: 9



Findings: Challenges

Venues were asked to evaluate a range of factors based on the level of challenge they posed to their business at the time of the research.

Key insights

The challenges most commonly reported by businesses were the cost of living crisis (60.3%, n=47) and the impact of more people working from home (43.6%, n=34). The least challenging factor was staff training, with only four businesses (5.1%) identifying it as a challenge.

Staff recruitment and retention were not a challenge for 44.9% (n=35), though 25.6% (n=20) reported it as an issue. Interestingly, there was a roughly equal split between recruitment being the problem and retention being the problem.

Perceptions of crime and feelings of safety were not a challenge for 42.3% (n=33), whereas a third (33.3%, n=36) reported this as a concern for their business.

In additional comments, theft was reported as a challenge by 14 businesses (17.9% of all respondents and 37.8% of those who provided additional comments).

Rough sleeping and issues associated with the street-based population were reported by 12 businesses (15.0% of all respondents and 32.4% of those who made additional comments).

Other issues, mentioned by a smaller number of businesses but on multiple occasions, included the impact of train and tube strikes, concerns about staff wellbeing, particularly in relation to the cost of living crisis, and the effects of roadworks and closed roads.

Findings: Support

Venues were asked how helpful support would be in a range of areas.

Key insights

Support for staff training was viewed as the least helpful form of assistance by businesses responding to the survey, with nearly two-thirds (61.5%, n=48) deeming it unhelpful.

Almost half of respondents (48.7%, n=38) indicated that support with staff recruitment and retention would not be helpful, although a significant proportion (33.3%, n=26) said they would find it useful. It is worth noting that many respondents emphasised the importance of focusing on retention rather than recruitment, and vice versa.

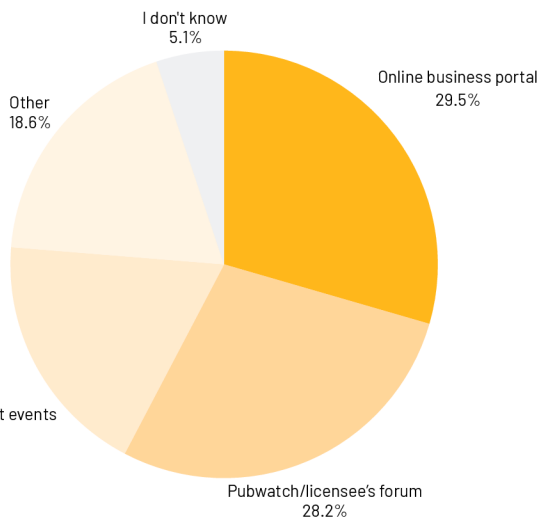
Similar perspectives were expressed regarding the usefulness of business planning support. Half of the respondents (50%, n=40) said it would not be helpful, while a third (33.3%, n=26) stated they would find it beneficial.

Opportunities linked to existing events were highly valued, with 69.2% (n=54) considering this support very helpful or helpful. Businesses also commented that they would value being informed about what events are happening in the local area.

The same positive response applied to connecting with cultural offers, which was well-regarded by 64.1% (n=50) of respondents. Ensuring public safety was also seen as a helpful suggestion, with 65.4% (n=51) of respondents finding this support very helpful or helpful. This sentiment was reinforced by multiple comments calling for an increased uniformed presence in the area.

Findings: Helpful approaches

Approaches and initiatives businesses would find helpful



Some respondents noted that they have an online portal accessible through the company website, though others mentioned that participation in any of these approaches would require sign-off from their head office.

Watch schemes, such as Pubwatch, Shopwatch and Theatrewatch were highlighted as useful.

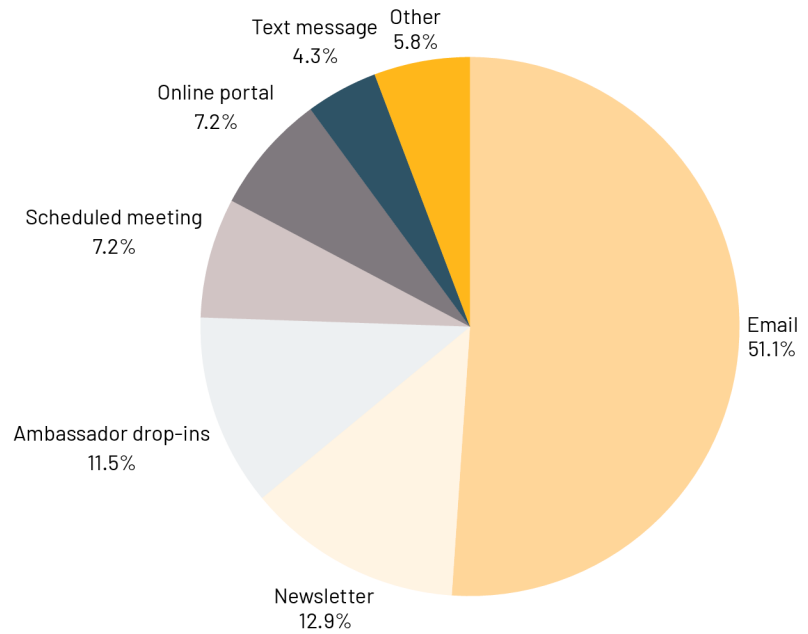
Workshops were seen as potentially beneficial, depending on their timing. Information-sharing tools, including group chats, WhatsApp, Loop and systems such as DISC or similar, were identified as helpful resources.

Several respondents asked for more information sharing from the police, particularly around crime statistics and actions being taken to address them.



Findings: Contact Methods

The best way for businesses to receive information and communications



Findings: Opportunities

Venues were asked what they think the biggest opportunities for the NTE and leisure businesses are, now and in the future.

Communication: Respondents identified communication as one of the most significant opportunities. There was a strong desire for more joined-up communication among stakeholders in the evening and night-time economy. A key focus was on fostering better communication between venues within the London Heritage Quarter, particularly between general managers. At a strategic level, businesses saw opportunities for improved communication between BIDs, the local authority and businesses, with a particular emphasis on promptly sharing information about changes in the area.

Events and Partnerships: The importance of events and partnerships was also highlighted as a key opportunity. Suggestions included organising more street fairs and hosting prominent events such as Christmas, Pride, and other local celebrations. Major sporting events were identified as potential draws for increased footfall. Respondents emphasised the importance of avoiding the relocation of businesses during major celebrations, such as New Year's Eve, to maximise opportunities. Collaboration with local businesses and theatres, along with the introduction of food and street markets, was strongly supported. Public holidays were seen as an additional opportunity for special events, while internal events like karaoke, quizzes, and live music were proposed to engage local communities. Partnering with universities and leveraging events in Trafalgar Square were also suggested to enhance the area's appeal. Extending opening and licensing hours was viewed as a way to further capitalise on these opportunities and create a vibrant, dynamic environment.

Findings: Opportunities

Venues were asked what they think the biggest opportunities for the NTE and leisure businesses are, now and in the future.

Physical Environment: Respondents identified opportunities to improve the public realm and physical environment at night. Suggestions included enhancing street cleansing and increasing recycling opportunities. Some respondents also pointed to the potential for developing the streetscape and better utilising space in the area, such as outside spaces and vacant premises, including office spaces. Additionally, improving the variety of businesses operating in the area was seen as an opportunity to boost its appeal.

Footfall: Improving the public realm and physical environment was also linked to increasing footfall. Enhancements such as better street cleansing, recycling facilities, and streetscape development were seen as key opportunities. Suggestions also included making more effective use of outside spaces and empty premises. Respondents believed diversifying the types of businesses operating in the area could further contribute to increased footfall.

Security: Businesses highlighted opportunities to enhance security, reiterating earlier suggestions such as increasing uniformed presence and implementing schemes like Pubwatch. Managing homelessness and providing support for individuals with street-based lifestyles were also identified as priorities. Respondents emphasised the importance of proactive and preventative security measures, along with opportunities to showcase safe venues to improve public perception.

Findings: Challenges

Venues were asked what they think the biggest challenges for the NTE and leisure businesses will be in the future.

Security: Security challenges were prominently highlighted by respondents, with concerns raised about improving the perception of crime, particularly in relation to drugs and drunkenness. Businesses reported a significant rise in thefts of bags and mobile phones, as well as an increase in shoplifting. The lack of security and police presence in the evenings has left customers feeling unsafe and, in some cases, fearful of visiting. The safety of staff finishing late shifts was also identified as a pressing concern.

Footfall: Respondents noted several challenges affecting footfall in the area. Victoria Station remains quieter than usual, partly due to transport strikes and the late cancellation of these strikes, which disrupt travel plans. The lingering effects of COVID-19, along with events causing road closures, have further reduced foot traffic. The shift towards working from home has also decreased the number of people in the area. A lack of information about transport strikes and tourist numbers that have yet to recover to pre-pandemic levels were also highlighted. Late-night footfall is minimal, and protests frequently disrupt business activity. Additionally, competition from other businesses was raised as a concern.

Cost of living: The cost of living crisis poses significant challenges. Rising base costs have squeezed margins, and reduced disposable income has impacted consumer spending. Many businesses reported being unable to absorb these increased costs, with the crisis also affecting staff. A notable reduction in alcohol spending was observed, and the increase in the National Living Wage has further strained budgets.

Findings: Challenges

Venues were asked what they think the biggest challenges for the NTE and leisure businesses will be in the future.

Staffing: Staffing shortages were frequently mentioned as a major challenge. Respondents highlighted the need for greater flexibility to meet current staffing requirements and attract new employees.

Physical environment: Challenges related to the physical environment included adverse weather conditions and ongoing roadworks, which restrict access and detract from the area's appeal. Respondents suggested better utilisation of alleyways and raised concerns about street cleanliness. Premises located on the outskirts of the area are particularly affected by poor street maintenance and a lack of public upkeep.

Events, licensing and collaboration: Breaks in theatre programming have caused disruption, and respondents expressed the need for greater support for events. Licensing challenges, such as the reduction in outdoor seating and the denial of Temporary Event Notices (TENs), were also noted. Residential issues were identified as barriers to smoother event organisation and partnership opportunities.

Suggested Actions

Actions are grouped into three thematic priorities to address the challenges and opportunities identified.



1. Business Support

Reduce the costs of doing business, provide assistance with recruitment and retention, and foster improved partnership working.



2. Encouraging Footfall and Consumer Spend

Address challenges and opportunities related to the cost of living crisis, increased remote working, maintaining and growing footfall (particularly at night), and enhancing support for events.



3. Being Safe, Feeling Safe

Support issues around crime and disorder including theft and rough sleeping. Work to improve perceptions and feelings of safety at night for visitors and workers alike.

Business Support

Objective 1A: Enhancing Communication and Partnership Working



Westminster After Dark Strategy

Work closely alongside Westminster City Council align the actions from this research with its Westminster After Dark strategy, launching in 2025.



Communicating Existing Work

Some levy payers are unaware of the support offered by London HQ, mostly due to be too time-poor to read email communications, attend events and so on. Pubwatch meetings will help, but other opportunities to “take the message to the business” should be experimented with to increase engagement by these businesses with the very beneficial work of the BID.



Online Business Portal

Establish an online business support portal to share key information from local stakeholders such as Westminster City Council, the Metropolitan Police, and London HQ. The portal could give access to SEEDL courses, free policy templates (provided by National Pubwatch and Best Bar None), free setup resources for Ask for Angela, information on national campaigns, details of the support available from the Licensed Trade Charity and so on.

Business Support

Objective 1A: Enhancing Communication and Partnership Working

Partnership forums

Develop or strengthen Pubwatch schemes or other licensee forums within the area and promote broader attendance from partners. Ensuring consistent police and local authority representation is key to the success of these meetings. Even better if these agencies can also promote attendance.

After Dark working group

Establish a multi-partnership After Dark Working Group with appropriate membership and governance structures. This should align with Westminster City Council's After Dark plans.

Communication

Identify and facilitate additional opportunities for enhanced communication between businesses, residents and the council, such as regular informal meetings to discuss key topics or potential issues before they escalate. Facilitate communication of important information to businesses, e.g. about protests or road closures.

Business Support

Objective 1B: Mitigate the Cost of Doing Business



Additional discounts

Explore and promote further opportunities for supply chain discounts or bulk purchasing, including existing initiatives such as the current discount on waste management.



Efficiency training

Deliver training programmes on cost management, energy efficiency and customer service to help businesses streamline operations and improve efficiency.



Communication

Identify and facilitate additional opportunities for enhanced communication between businesses, residents and the council, such as regular informal meetings to discuss key topics or potential issues before they escalate.

Business Support

Objective 1B: Mitigate the Cost of Doing Business

Additional discounts

Explore and promote further opportunities for supply chain discounts or bulk purchasing, including existing initiatives such as the current discount on waste management.

Efficiency training

Deliver training programmes on cost management, energy efficiency and customer service to help businesses streamline operations and improve efficiency.

Industry campaigns

Identify and support industry campaigns lobbying the government for additional sector support, such as those led by UK Hospitality.

Funding opportunities

Seek out and promote opportunities for grants, funding streams and cost-saving initiatives for businesses from sources beyond the BID.

Business Support

Objective 1C: Supporting Staff Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment support

Youth and Education Engagement:

- Collaborate with schools to introduce hospitality careers through workshops and shadowing opportunities.
- Engage with universities and colleges to encourage part-time work and placement schemes.

Recruitment Events and Support Services:

- Work with Westminster to leverage further opportunities and promote the Westminster Works programme.
- Consider partnering with industry-specific programmes e.g. Only A Pavement Away, Springboard and the Hospitality Sector-based Work Academy Programme (Department of Work & Pensions and UK Hospitality). The Drinks Trust collaborates with industry operators to support recruitment by providing part- or fully-funded training to applicants who may not meet current criteria. The NTIA has launched "Job Places for Night Spaces," a recruitment platform designed specifically for the night-time industries.
- Organise or participate in hospitality-focused local job fairs.
- Leverage services like the DWP CV sifting service to streamline recruitment processes.

Flexible and Innovative Workforce Solutions:

- Explore initiatives like Stint to create a more adaptable workforce.
- Develop staff-sharing agreements between businesses to address short-term or seasonal labour shortages.

Business Support

Objective 1C: Supporting Staff Recruitment and Retention

Retention support

Training and professional development:

- Promote the London HQ partnership with SEEDL training, to incentivise workers to remain in the industry and clear pathways for career advancement.
- Promote 'The Drinks Community', a free networking platform that fosters connections and opportunities through upskilling, training, networking and mentoring.

Workplace wellbeing and flexibility:

- Promote BID wellbeing initiatives further to leisure and hospitality staff.
- Deliver mental health first aid training and ensure access to support, e.g. promote The Licensed Trade Charity, which offers free support to anyone who has ever worked in hospitality.

Recognition and inclusivity:

- Consider a "London HQ employee of the month" and long-term service reward schemes.
- Develop an employer's charter for LHQ businesses to commit to actions to support their teams.
- Foster diversity and inclusion through training and inclusive workplace practices (e.g. SEEDL training).

Building community and engagement:

- Support businesses to use surveys and forums for employee feedback.
- Establish mentorship programmes to support peer-to-peer learning and team-building. The Drinks Trust offers a mentoring programme which could be promoted.

Business Support

Objective 1C: Supporting Staff Recruitment and Retention



Other support

Industry and government advocacy:

- Highlight career progression through campaigns showcasing success stories within the hospitality sector.
- Advocate for government support, such as flexible visa schemes for international workers.

Branding and partnerships:

- Use strategic marketing to position hospitality as a rewarding career choice.
- Build cross-industry partnerships to share best practices and create transferable opportunities for employees.

Additional support for businesses and employees:

- Provide crisis support resources, such as emergency funds, for employees in financial or personal difficulties. Again, the Licensed Trade Charity can help.
- Develop a network of hospitality ambassadors to inspire and attract new recruits.

Encouraging Footfall and Spend

Objective 2A: Enhance Opportunities Linked With Events

Promote local events

Collaborate with Westminster City Council to provide businesses with information on the local event programme and identify opportunities for local hospitality businesses.

Event space promotion

Consider how to develop the excellent event booking service offered by London HQ to incorporate promotion of smaller spaces for smaller events e.g. celebrations and community events.

Night markets

Assess the feasibility and potential benefits of a night market. The Greater London Authority's Business Friendly Licensing project has case studies of how recent night markets were successfully delivered in London.

Partner with cultural community

Develop a dedicated programme of partnership opportunities with local cultural venues.

Encouraging Footfall and Spend

Objective 2B: Enhanced Marketing for Member Businesses



LHQ Hub

Review and enhance the functionality of the LHQ Hub to drive footfall and spending, e.g. linking retail deals and walking trails with local hospitality offers. Consider walking trails that encompass hospitality businesses e.g. venues where famous people have been patrons, or that were featured in films or TV shows.



Targeted marketing campaigns

Run campaigns showcasing LHQ's unique offerings, highlighting hidden gems, leveraging social media influencers and partnerships with local media outlets.

Being Safe, Feeling Safe

Objective 3A: Promote Partnership Initiatives

Continue support of local safety work

Support businesses to participate in night safety initiatives by Westminster City Council, such as Women's Night Safety accreditation and becoming official Safe Havens. Continue collaboration with the Metropolitan Police and Westminster City Council to address issues like rough sleeping and theft.

Best practice schemes

Consider implementing industry best practice schemes that encourage partnership working, such as Best Bar None and Ask for Angela. Best Bar None offers free template policies and resources for anyone to use. The national Ask for Angela site has free workbooks that businesses can download to help them implement the scheme.

Continual monitoring & improvement

Facilitate quarterly night walks with partners, including Westminster City Council and the Metropolitan Police, to review safety measures and identify needs. Conduct regular consumer perception surveys to assess safety and identify emerging issues.

Being Safe, Feeling Safe

Objective 3B: Increase Capable Guardians at Night

Night Stars

Promote closer collaboration with and increased visibility of the Night Stars programme, including supporting volunteer recruitment to help increase coverage.

Safety training

Provide free or subsidised in-person and online training, including conflict management, enhanced bystander intervention, and Ask for Angela/WAVE.

Night time patrols

Consider introducing evening or night-time BID rangers or security patrols, even if just during peak periods such as festive periods or summer.

Partnering with Met Police

Explore further partnerships with Met Police for example to help share intelligence such as policing plans for peak periods, and to support the rollout of "Safest Ever Neighbourhoods" to ensure it aligns with business needs.

Being Safe, Feeling Safe

Objective 3C: Use Technology to Support Night Safety

Enhancing existing systems

Expand the use of radio systems to ensure all relevant stakeholders have access. Enhance SentrySIS for communicating information on anti-social behaviour and crime, and improve use of the Emergency Notification Platform for timely updates e.g. about road closures and protests.

Personal safety apps

Promote personal safety apps for customers and night-time workers, such as PeopleSafe and StaffGuard.

Partnering with Met Police

Explore further partnerships with Met Police for example to help share intelligence such as policing plans for peak periods, and to support the rollout of "Safest Ever Neighbourhoods" to ensure it aligns with business needs.

Next Steps

Alignment:

Work with Westminster City Council to identify how to structure this work to ensure it aligns with its After Dark Night Time Strategy.

Prioritisation:

Prioritise initiatives based on feasibility, suitability for the BID's priorities, impact and resource requirements

Timelines and Milestones:

Add specific timelines for each action item to ensure clear accountability and tracking.

Stakeholder Roles:

Discuss with partners and define who will be responsible for each action (e.g. BID team, local authority, Met Police, etc.).



Case Studies

Useful case studies to support some of the priorities identified are provided below.

Tailored Support

Hackney Nights is a comprehensive initiative by Hackney Council aimed at supporting hospitality businesses, promoting safety and enhancing the overall experience of the night-time economy in Hackney. Recent additional services include noise mediation and notifying businesses of planning applications in the vicinity of each licensed premises in the borough.

Southwark Hospitality Skills Hub

Southwark Council has launched a Hospitality Skills Hub to train local residents interested in entering the hospitality industry. The hub aims to create jobs and apprenticeships over the next two years, addressing recruitment and retention challenges.

Colchester City Worker's Hub

Colchester BID launched a City Worker's Hub to help with recruitment, retention, training and rewarding those working in the city. Initially launched for the hospitality sector, it has been rolled out to retail and has attracted investment from Colchester City Council through funding streams designed to support skills development.

Acknowledgements

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