

MAYOR OF LONDON

Night Surgery Greenwich





Night Surgery: Greenwich

London's Night Czar, Amy Lamé, describes her recent visit to the Royal Borough of Greenwich. Night Surgeries are part of her work with London boroughs, businesses and community groups to put in place night time strategies, test new night time initiatives and improve life at night in London.

The Royal Borough of Greenwich has been navigating a period of considerable change. The borough has the third highest housing target in the London Plan and is home to a growing mix of creative and cultural businesses and venues. However, the impacts of Covid-19 have been severe for one of London's biggest tourist destinations. This is particularly the case in the historic heart of Greenwich town centre, where tourists previously made up 60 per cent of footfall. Some local attractions have seen visitor numbers fall by 90 per cent compared to 2019.

In this context, it was so encouraging to meet with borough officers, councillors, business owners and partners. They are developing ambitious plans together, using the Mayor's High Street for All Challenge Fund to create a more diverse nightlife for Greenwich.

North Greenwich



Peninsula Square

The entertainment district is a major destination, with The O2 at its heart. It has a wide catchment area and is supporting night time activities on Friday and Saturday evenings, as well as attracting footfall after working hours during the week too.

Design District



The Design District Canteen

I was excited to visit the emerging Design District, a pedestrianised neighbourhood of 16 commercial buildings housing creative businesses.

It was great to hear from Queercircle, one of the newest tenants, who move into their space in June on an affordable five-year lease. Their new exhibition, library and project space will deliver a programme of evening events and activities that champion wellbeing for LGBTQ+ communities. They will be open from 10am-10pm throughout the week.

The NOW Gallery is one of several new culture, leisure and entertainment venues emerging in the district. I met the gallery's curatorial team and experienced 'Your Ship Has Landed', an immersive installation by Lydia Chan that was housed at the gallery.

The Design District Canteen – an indoor street food market – is another venue in the area seeking to draw in new audiences adding to the usual footfall attracted by The O2, the area's anchor venue.

The O2



The O2 Arena's main entrance

As The O2 nears its 15th birthday, it was wonderful to see one of London's iconic music venues alive with activity again. I was surprised to learn that two thirds of the area's footfall stems from smaller events and activities outside the main arena. They include Mamma Mia the Party and TOCA Social. The O2 complex now hosts 30 food and drink businesses – the highest ever number despite the devastating impacts of Covid-19 – as well as the Icon Outlet shopping centre.

It was a reminder of the role venues play in supporting local businesses and thriving economies with a complex ecosystem of uses.

I was also pleased to hear that The O2 has invested in a Safe Space as part of its commitment to women's safety.

Maritime Greenwich



St Alfege Church from Nelson Road

Greenwich is well served by the river's extensive public transport network. Thames Clipper services connect Woolwich in the east with Maritime Greenwich, as well as providing stunning night time views of London. We took advantage of this service to get to the borough's historic centre.

With the dramatic fall in international visitors over the last two years, I was keen to hear about the ideas to develop post-6pm activities. We discussed potential museum lates and other family-friendly activities across the town centre as part of a programme of Thursday Lates at the end of every month. The lighting across the world heritage site is also set to be unified, with the potential for routes and spaces between heritage assets to be strengthened through lighting installations.

It was great to see the illuminated St Alfege Church at the end of Nelson Road – a reminder of lighting's role in wayfinding and placemaking at night. It was interesting to note that overhead on Nelson Road the main street lights were switched off, but the light from shopfronts and interiors of ground floor hospitality businesses still made the street feel well-lit and gave it a warm, intimate feeling.

Clocktower Market



Clocktower Market

We stopped off at the open space adjoining the former Rivington pub. The space previously hosted the Clocktower Market and we discussed opportunities for small scale evening events to be trialled in the space, with opportunities for the new building tenants to help activate and programme its use. I encouraged the council to work with local residents and businesses to pilot a range of activities and events in the space to test its potential. Low-cost lighting could help enhance its sense of place and, alongside subtle illumination to the nearby clocktower, could help bridge a gap in light and activity between St Alfege Church and Greenwich Station after dark.

Greenwich Market



Greenwich Market

My final stop in Greenwich town centre was Greenwich Market. The large, brightly-lit space was empty at night, with a few night time businesses surrounding the trading area. The market currently packs down from 3-4pm and there is a clear opportunity to animate it later into the evening. The space has the potential to provide a safe, sheltered and family-friendly venue at night.

I heard that many traders were not keen to extend their hours as many start their day at 7.30am, so we discussed opportunities for different traders to set up in the evening to activate the space later and provide opportunities to more businesses.

Woolwich

Woolwich is the largest town centre in the borough and was our final stop of the night. With a large number of new residential developments bringing a growing population to the area, there is a need to support a range of night time leisure and cultural activities. The borough is investing in several ambitious cultural spaces, housed in heritage buildings, and I was excited to see how these places were functioning at night.

We arrived at Woolwich, travelling again by river, and discussed the importance of sensitive lighting at the riverside and opportunities for lighting The Royal Brass Foundry façade to help draw visitors towards the town centre. I had a chance to briefly speak to the manager of the Dial Arch pub, who told me that that 80 to 90 per cent of his employees are local to the area.

In the market square, which operates during the daytime, I heard about ambitious plans to better connect the high street, market square and riverside. The market square and high street are served by a DLR station, which will soon be joined by a new station on the Elizabeth Line.

The market square and high street lacked animation at night and the proximity of residents to many of the commercial spaces requires uses to be carefully managed to ensure they are attractive to residents and visitors, which will help reinforce the high street as a centre for local communities.



The Royal Arsenal from the Thames Clipper pier



Beresford Square

Woolwich Works



Woolwich Works

My final stop of the evening was Woolwich Works, the recently opened complex of five refurbished heritage industrial buildings on the site of the former the Royal Arsenal. The development is home to rehearsal and recording studios, gallery and event spaces, a café and a bar. The buildings are open until 11pm from Wednesday to Saturday and are at the heart of the emerging creative district in Woolwich. The complex is home to a number of creative organisations, including immersive theatre company Punchdrunk whose latest show was launching two weeks after my visit. They will also participate in the Greenwich and Docklands International Festival, as well as running a season of events and pop-ups in the summer.



WOOLWICH WORKS

Opening
Thursday 23 September 2021

www.woolwich.org.uk

Kings Cross Station
Glasgow

Final thoughts

It was brilliant to meet so many stakeholders and council teams who are all working together in partnership to deliver ambitious plans that take advantage of what the borough has to offer. Greenwich is growing rapidly and it's encouraging to see new night time venues, businesses and activities being developed alongside new housing and residential communities.

But as pressure mounts for boroughs to meet their housing targets across London, it's vital that developments are designed for a range of activities and work that takes place over 24 hours, making use of underused times of day while ensuring the offer works for locals and visitors alike.

I really look forward to my next visit and am excited to see Greenwich's night time culture go from strength to strength.

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