

## Open Call Empowering Platforms: reimagining the Thames Riverfront



Source: Westminster City Council, 2020.

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### The commission

The London Festival of Architecture (LFA), Westminster City Council (WCC) and the Northbank Business Improvement District invite architects, landscape architects, designers and artists to submit an expression of interest for our competition to design a ‘empowering platform’ that will reimagine the experience people have with the Thames Riverfront, creating a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the ‘benches on a step’ that are now found alongside the Thames Path.

The design competition is to select a winning design that will offer a more inclusive, accessible and stimulating way of experiencing the area. The design concept must have the ambition to prompt new or improved forms of interaction with the riverside and create opportunities for engaging with the public and debating what the future of the riverfront and its surrounding areas could be.

It is desirable that the selected design will acknowledge and aim to relate to the heritage and conservation context of listed buildings and structures, landmarks, protected views and famous landscape in the area; reflect and respect the safety considerations of being near the River Thames; consider and enhance the environmental role of the river; be flexible to be used by diverse users (tourists, regular users and residents) and fit into different locations and contexts alongside the riverfront.

There will be up to two selected designs awarded £20K each including a design fee of £2k to develop two fully costed design interventions that can be delivered during June 2019 as part of the London Festival of Architecture. The installations will change location 2 times during a three months period. Therefore, they should be designed in a way that can be easily assembled, disassembled and transported. At the end, the two platforms will be disassembled or, if successful, could be granted planning permission to be permanently installed on the riverfront.

This will be a chance to participate in a unique project and showcase your imaginative design to the public and the many festival producers involved.

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## The Context

The Thames Riverfront in the City of Westminster is a world-known destination and one of London's great assets. However, we understand it is not being used to its full potential. Westminster City Council is producing a 'Place Plan' to describe the existing issues and priorities, establish objectives and give details on a range of realistic projects that will help deliver immediate and longer-term improvement to the area.

The Thames Riverfront Place Plan focuses on five kilometres of Westminster's riverfront, aiming to enhance the natural environment and public realm to deliver a unique and world-renowned destination. The project remit runs from Victoria Embankment Gardens to Chelsea Bridge, incorporates key sites and world-famous landmarks and is linked to other place shaping priorities in the Council's agenda (e.g. Strand Aldwych scheme and Victoria Place Plan).

This project seeks to:

- Reconnect the City of Westminster to the Thames Riverfront;
- Make the Thames Path more inviting for different users: local community, regular users and visitors;
- Reflect the inner boroughs' culture and assets while creating a legible, accessible and attractive public realm;
- Value views, landmarks and heritage by activating cultural and commercial character of the area;
- Address climate emergency, promote sustainable travel patterns and better air quality, health and wellbeing;
- Benefit from and enhance the potential of current plans and projects in development.

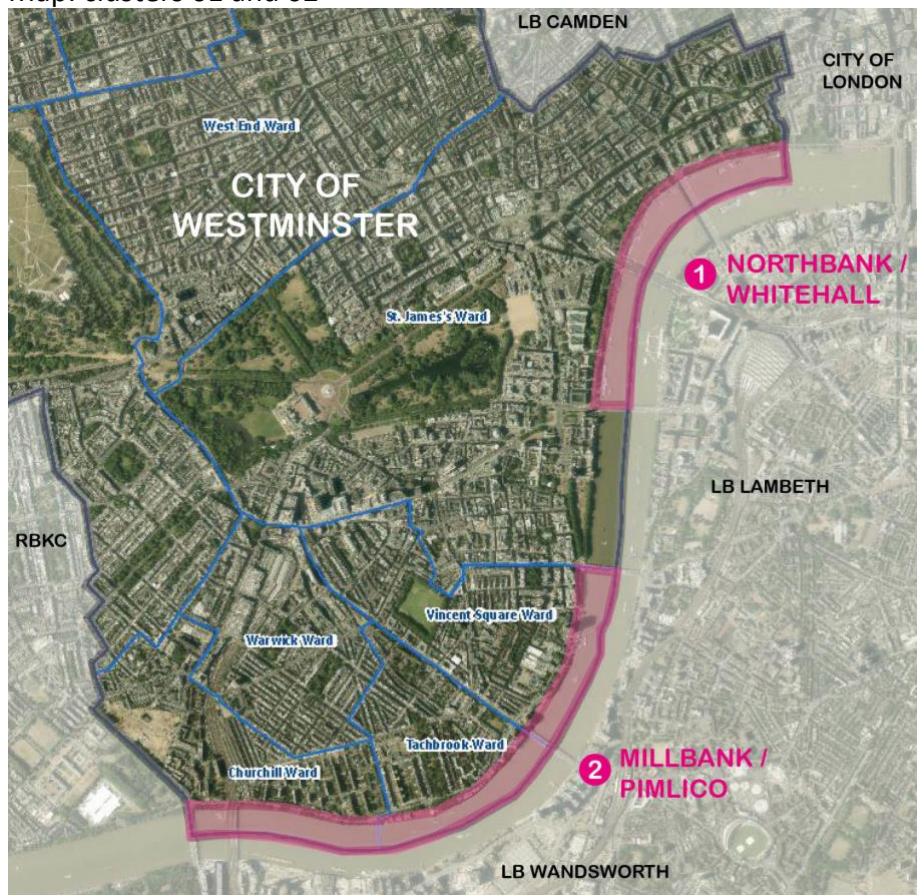
This opportunity is seen as the start of a conversation of a wider riverfront strategy. It brings the opportunity to create a vision for the future use of this space through the testing of small-scale interventions, open space for engagement of the local community and stakeholders and provide evidence to help us measure the success of this intervention. All these should feedback to the Place Plan and help shape its long-term vision and strategy.

## The sites

Two clusters of locations across Westminster's Riverfront have been identified: Northbank / Whitehall and Millbank / Pimlico. These are areas where there is significant scope for public realm enhancement. This project must deliver a flexible design solution that can be installed in up to three different locations (exact locations to be defined in the competition's second phase).

Sites will be chosen to allow the testing of multiple settings, contexts and interactions with stakeholders, being a key component of the engagement strategy, which will be closely tied to the platform's installation. The teams can indicate a preferred cluster of sites in your design proposal. However, please bear in mind that you might not be granted the preferred site. The design proposal should therefore be flexible and adjustable to other sites or different dimensions.

Map: clusters 01 and 02



Source: Westminster City Council, 2020.

For this initial phase, we are providing one example of location for each cluster that represent the key challenges and opportunities that might also be found in the other locations.

Identified opportunities of the sites to consider:

- views to the Thames River and world-know landmarks and skyline; historical, cultural and heritage character of the area, including the Westminster World Heritage Site, monuments and structures;
- proximity to cultural and educational institutions (like Somerset House and Tate Britain, King's College and Chelsea College of Arts);
- the transport infrastructure in the area, including underground and rail stations, Thames Clippers' Piers, the cycle paths and footpaths; the environmental and ecological assets of the area, including the River, the protected trees, the gardens and squares nearby;
- the commercial, historical and leisure boats and piers; links to wider opportunity areas; proximity to residential and tranquil areas; among others.

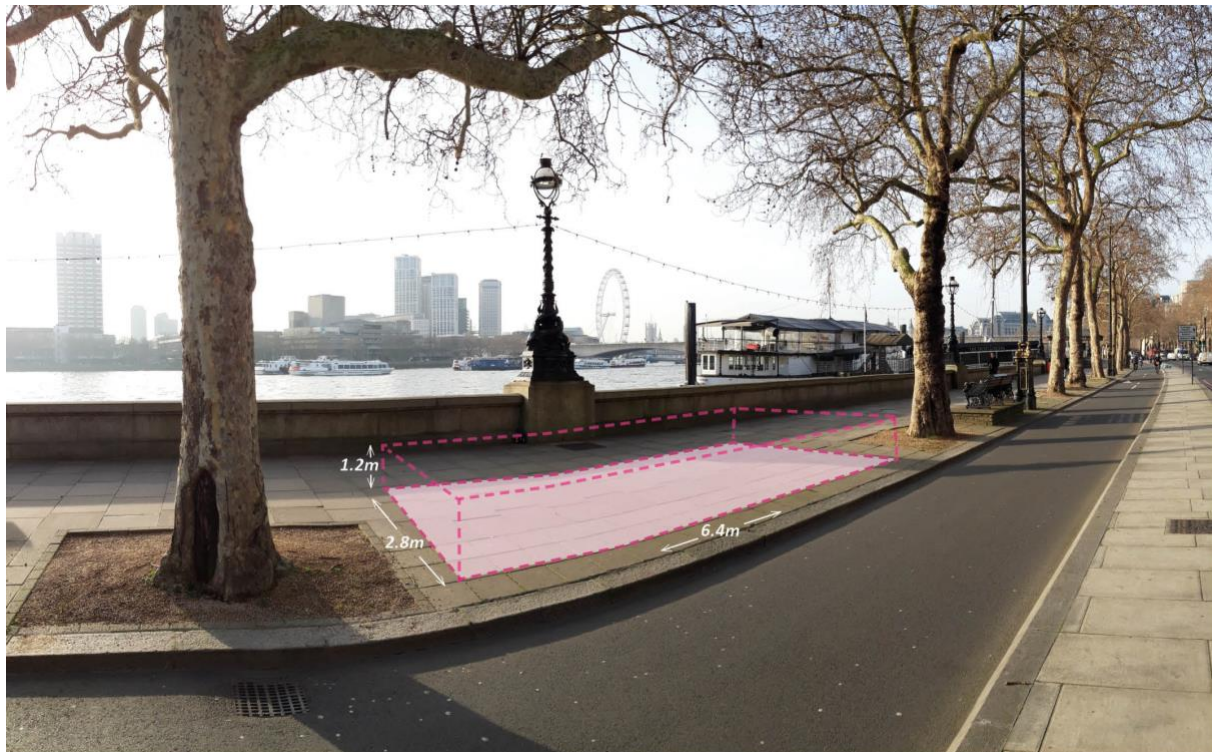
Identified challenges of the sites to consider:

- air-pollution;
- absence of footfall;
- safety (traffic, river and anti-social behaviour);
- rough sleeping and limited facilities for users (toilets, commercial activity and seats);
- limited permeability and connectivity from the Thames Path to and from the adjacent roads' footpaths;
- obstructed views to landmarks and the river; among others.

The proposed intervention should be located in between two trees or lamp posts, on the footpath, between the cycle path and the river wall. It should allow for people to use the footpath freely without any obstruction, and at the same time, provide a space that encourages people to dwell, pause and engage with the site and the river in an unexpected way. The images below show the maximum dimensions allowed for the proposal: 2.8m X 6.4m x 1.2m. Elements higher than 1.2m might be accepted if they don't have any standing/seating element.

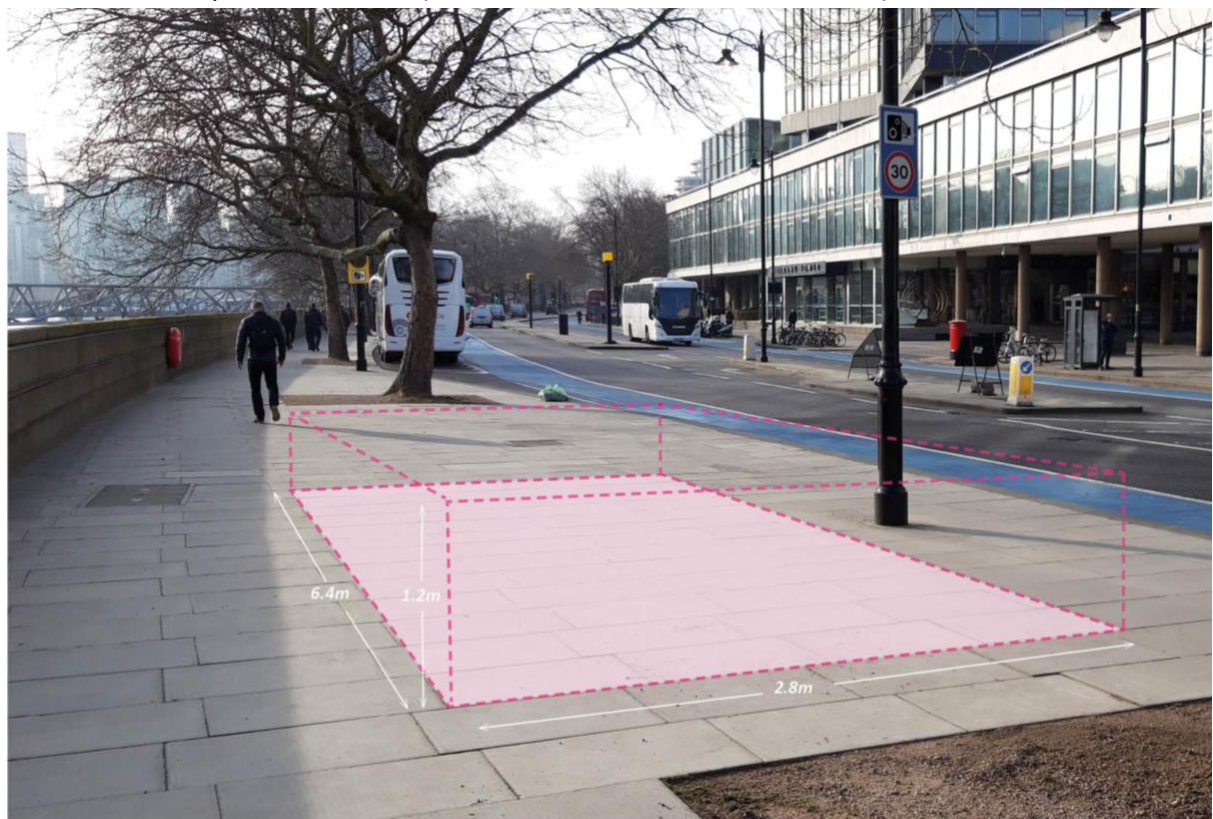
The six locations on which the proposed design will be temporarily installed will have a varied balance of different users: visitors, regular users and local community.

*Cluster 01 example on Victoria Embankment (near Temple Station)*



Source: Westminster City Council, 2020.

*Cluster 02 example on Millbank (near Victoria Tower Gardens South)*



Source: Westminster City Council, 2020.

## Design requirements

The applicant is required to provide a creative design solution for the intervention which improves how people experience and interact with the Thames Riverfront, while enhancing the look and feel of the site. We are looking for an intervention that functions for visitors and passers-by (is not purely sculptural) and is realistic to the brief (does not become a pavilion or a folly). It must be safe, durable and offer a low-cost design solution that can be easily installed, disassembled, moved and installed in a different location. At the same time, it must be steady enough to not be moved by accident or intentionally without permission.

The intervention should explore a broad range of options for the riverfront; testing ways of improving the area, proposing a structure that is creative, aims to reimagine how people use the area today and enable people to experience the riverfront in a new way. It should provide a more inclusive, accessible and inspiring solution to enhance the look and feel of the area, to increase footfall and accessibility to the site, prompting conversations with the local community and stakeholders about its potential.

Proposals must:

- Offer a useable and engaging resource (not just an artistic installation);
- Provide seating that is inclusive and accessible for different age groups and people with different abilities;
- Create a public realm infrastructure to transform people's desire to pause and dwell in the site, reimagining how people experience the riverfront and its views;
- Provide physical support for local wayfinding, engagement, activities and events that will take place during the installation to discuss the future of the riverfront.

We would advise you to also consider in the design proposal:

- Creating a narrative and/or opportunity to better celebrate the unique history and cultural assets of the river and/or the neighbouring areas;
- Facilitating community uses and other forms of activation that offer a contrasting experience to the town centres;
- Adding new greening/planting to tackle air pollution and boost ecosystems;
- Utilising digital/technological solutions that answer to the temporary and off-grid nature of the sites;
- Providing support facilities for both pedestrians and cyclists.

The winning team will be expected to undertake the following tasks:

- Provide a feasible and on-budget design solution for the 'platform' that is robust enough to cope with being in the public realm in an area with limited passive surveillance;
- Project management and delivery of the winning design;
- Build; install, disassemble, move and install the winning design platform (two times); and disassemble on completion.

## Further guidance

- **Budget:** The budget will be managed by the entrant. There is no restriction on how the budget should be divided between various aspects of the proposal;
- **Materials:** You can use new, salvaged materials or seek in-kind materials sponsorship to reduce expenses. The re-use of the materials or of parts (or whole) of the platform after disassembly is also to be considered;
- **Design:** The intervention should be robust enough to withstand all weather conditions and potential damage. It must acknowledge the conservation and heritage character of the sites and structures, as well as the nearby presence of the trees. Some restrictions apply:
  - The design team must assure the assembly/construction as to consider the limitation of trees nearby (e.g. using cranes to lift the 'platforms'). No tree pruning should be needed at any point and there can be no foundations or digging near trees (considering the impact on roots);
  - The platform should be strong and firm enough to be in place without drilling or similar fixing, but be steady enough to not be moved away by users;
  - As for the conservation and heritage aspects, it is crucial to ensure that it doesn't cause an unaccepted degree of harm to character and appearance of the conservation areas and the settings of listed buildings, including street furniture. The impact of the structure on heritage and conservation aspects should also ensure it is outweighed by public benefit.
- **Health & safety:** The drawings will be checked by a CDM (construction design and management) professional who will also carry out a risk assessment to ensure the project is safe for public use. It must consider the implications of its proximity to the Thames, to the cycle lanes and roads nearby, among others. You may be asked to make modifications to comply with the risk assessment requirements.
- **Durability:** The project will exist for at least three months and you should consider the longevity and appearance of your design accordingly, to ensure that no maintenance is required during this period.
- **Maintenance:** Design should also consider sustainability and require minimum maintenance. If needed, the winner team must assure the platform will be repaired to be fit for use for the whole agreed period.
- **Insurance:** Your practice / collaboration needs to have Professional Indemnity of £1million to be eligible to go through to shortlisting. The project will require Public Liability of £10million throughout the construction period and the whole installation period, from June throughout September 2020. Any incurred costs for setting an insurance can be covered via the project budget.
- **Project ownership and responsibility:** The winning design platform will be the property of the Westminster City Council for the duration of the installation. The winning design team will be responsible for the design, construction, assembly, maintenance, moving of the platforms and disassembly during the whole installation period (June to September 2020).
- **Long-term:** Subject to durability and planning permission, your intervention may be able to be in place or moved to a different location for an extended period. There will be a collaborative effort between LFA, WCC and the winning design team to

create a long-term use of the platform. The options will be discussed once the selected design is confirmed. We are keen to receive design proposals that can bring ideas on what a long-term use of the platforms can be.

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## Budget

Each platform will have allocated a £20K budget plus VAT, that includes all fees, fabrication, installation and move in between three different locations (please consider the need to disassembling and installing again). The budget outline above also considers a design fee of £2K inc. VAT for the winning team. The payments will be agreed against deliverables during inception meeting once the winning team is appointed.

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## Submission

This competition has a two-stage submission. This first stage submission should include:

1. Full name and contact details including postal address, contact number and email of project lead.
2. Brief biographies of all the project team.
3. A 200-word description about your practice along with any relevant technical experience acquired through previous experience; please include images of relevant previous work.
4. A short paragraph of max. 300 words on why you are interested in being involved in the project. You may wish to include some thoughts about your vision including any initial written reactions you may have to the brief.
5. No design work is required for the first stage and any included sketches will not be shared with the judges.

These submissions will be shortlisted by the judging panel. Up to 6 shortlisted practices will then be invited to develop a design concept based on the information laid out in this open call and will be awarded an honorarium of £500 inc. VAT each.

The work required for the second phase of the project will be reflective of the honorarium sum; therefore, we will be expecting the equivalent of an A2 board explaining your proposal. This can come in the form your practice feels will most effectively communicate your design to the judging panel.

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## Eligibility

The competition is open to architects, landscape architects, designers and artists. We welcome collaborations however the project must be actively led by a named architect.



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## Deadline and submission details

- Deadline for first submission is 8.00am on Monday 23 March 2020. Submissions received after this time will not be considered.
- For competition enquires please contact: [rosa@londonfestivalofarchitecture.org](mailto:rosa@londonfestivalofarchitecture.org)
- Please send expressions of interest in a PDF format via:  
<https://www.londonfestivalofarchitecture.org/westminster/>
- The PDF should be no more than 5MB and 10 A4 pages.
- You will receive an email confirming receipt of your submission.

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## Schedule outline

Submissions open: Tuesday 25 February 2020

Submissions closed: Monday 23 March 2020

Successful shortlisted practices notified: w/c 23 March 2020

2<sup>nd</sup> submission: Friday 17 April 2020

2<sup>nd</sup> round interviews: w/c 20 April 2020

Winner notified: w/c 20 April 2020

Winning design opens to the public: June 2020

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## Judging panel

Adrian Evans (Director, Thames Festival Trust)

Chris Romer-Lee (Co-founder at Studio Octopi & Thames Baths CIC)

Katherine Fleming (Operations Director, Northbank BID)

Ramiro Levy (Place Shaping Officer, Westminster City Council)

Ruchi Chakravarty (Head of Place Shaping, Westminster City Council)

Tamsie Thomson (Director, London Festival of Architecture)

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## Further information

- To process entries to this competition we will share your application and any associated personal data provided on the application with our jury and competition partners.
- Submissions will be judged on originality, demonstration of creativity, and relevance to the brief as well as feasibility and how the proposal works in the context of the site.
- The ownership of Copyright of the design will be in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, that is Copyright rests with the author of the submitted design.
- All designs remain the intellectual property of the designer however the winning design will itself when built will be the property of Westminster City Council.

- Please bear in mind the project requires a fast turnaround and may have peak moments when your practice will need to dedicate sufficient staff to deliver the project on time, to budget and to the high standard expected by all stakeholders.
- Your practice / collaboration needs to have Professional Indemnity of £1million to be eligible to go through to shortlisting. The project will require Public Liability of £5million.
- Significant efforts are made by all stakeholders of the project to ensure wide media coverage; the winning design team will need to provide relevant spokespeople as requested.
- London Festival of Architecture and Westminster City Council reserve the right to use images from the submissions for promotional purposes in press, social media and publications. All endeavours will be made to ensure accurate accreditation.

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## Useful links

London Festival of Architecture:

[www.londonfestivalofarchitecture.org](http://www.londonfestivalofarchitecture.org)

Westminster City Council:

[www.westminster.gov.uk](http://www.westminster.gov.uk)

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## Contact

To submit your entry please visit:

<https://www.londonfestivalofarchitecture.org/westminster/>

For general enquires please contact: [rosa@londonfestivalofarchitecture.org](mailto:rosa@londonfestivalofarchitecture.org)

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## Disclaimer

The competition organisers are not liable for lost, misdirected, or late entries. Decisions of the jury represent their professional judgments and all decisions are final. While it is the intent to construct the winning scheme, the organisers reserve the right to not proceed with construction for any reason. Material submitted by you shall be your sole responsibility, shall not infringe or violate the rights of any other party or violate any laws, contribute to or encourage infringing or otherwise unlawful conduct, or otherwise be obscene, objectionable, or in poor taste. By submitting such material, you are representing that you are the owner of such material and/or have all necessary rights, licenses, and authorization to distribute it.



## London Festival of Architecture

The London Festival of Architecture celebrates London as a global hub of architectural experimentation, practice and debate. The festival returns to the capital from 1-30 June 2020 with a lively and diverse programme of public events across London exploring the theme 'power'. The London Festival of Architecture began in 2004, and has since grown to become Europe's biggest annual architecture festival. The festival attracts a vast public audience – 800,000 people in 2019 – and a global media audience of millions. The vast majority of events are free, and are staged by a core festival programming team working alongside architecture and design practices and practitioners, leading cultural and academic institutions, artists and many others. In 2017 the London Festival of Architecture was named by Mayor of London Sadiq Khan as one of his design advocate organisations, and is working alongside the Mayor's team to champion architecture, provide expertise and guidance, and help to make London a better city.

[www.londonfestivalofarchitecture.org](http://www.londonfestivalofarchitecture.org)

Twitter: @LFArchitecture



Westminster City Council

[www.westminster.gov.uk](http://www.westminster.gov.uk)

Twitter: @CityWestminster



Northbank BID

[www.thenorthbank.london](http://www.thenorthbank.london)

Twitter: @TheNorthbankBID

### Harrow Road Canalside Activation



© Luke O'Donovan

Following a design competition organised in early 2019, a stretch of the Grand Union Canal in west London burst into life. The Co-Mooring – a community-based project devised by WY Design, tomos.design, COMPENDIUM and Studio Yu – was selected as the winner of a the Harrow Road design competition to create a new public realm intervention alongside the Grand Union Canal, organised by the LFA and Westminster City Council (WCC), in partnership with the Canal & River Trust.

The Co-Mooring harnessed community activity taking place on London's canal network to enliven the space beneath the Westway flyover in the Harrow Road area of Westminster. The project created opportunities to connect boaters with local people, breaking down boundaries between the area's transient and permanent residents.

Throughout July, The Co-Mooring was the focus for events encouraging local residents who would not typically use the area to visit and take part in activities. For Westminster City Council, this was an important first step for discussion about the surrounding public realm, and meaningful public engagement on what future improvements around the canal should look like.

## City Parklets 2019



© Luke O'Donovan

Three city parklets, miniature landscaped spaces, are the result of a competition organised by the London Festival of Architecture in partnership with the City of London Corporation in 2019, and are intended both to showcase fresh design talent, and raise important questions about the boundaries between the individual and public realm within the city.

Architects, designers and artists were invited to submit a design proposal for a bespoke public parklet that will transform an unused kerbside space into a place to rest, relax and admire the City - bringing additional life, greenery and well-designed pedestrian amenity to the City's streets during the world's largest annual architecture festival.

Over 90 teams responded, with the final three entrants were as follows: The London Cablet by Fatkin (West Smithfield rotunda), Pavement Art Gallery by Patrick McEvoy (1 St Martins le Grand) and Rocks and Reeds by PARTI (Billiter Street).