

# High Streets Task Force Case Study: Waterloo Placemaking Strategy – developed by Waterloo BID



Summer 2023

# Case Study Information

<b>Date</b>	15 August 2023
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<b>Place</b>	London, UK's Waterloo neighbourhood, located just south of the Thames River
<b>Version</b>	1.0



# Waterloo Placemaking Strategy – developed by Waterloo BID

## Basic Facts about the high street and local area

### Description of the place

London's Waterloo neighbourhood is a diverse mixture of residents, businesses, commuters, and visitors, and is in central London's zone 1.

Waterloo's identity is largely defined by the proximity of Waterloo Station, one of Europe's busiest train stations, which bisects the overall area into two distinct sections, landing Waterloo's rival neighbourhood, the South Bank, – with its international cultural institutions – on the ideal riverfront side, with Waterloo landing on the unideal side, rear of the station side. The station itself therefore presents a barricade for those physically trying to access Waterloo's charms.

Waterloo is overflowing with independent, fringe businesses, alongside a wealth of dining options and alternative theatres and entertainment venues such as The Old Vic and The Young Vic. Most of the area's ground floor retail is located along the two busiest thoroughfares: Lower Marsh and The Cut. These two streets are connected via an intersection at Waterloo Road, which is the same street which hosts the entrance to Waterloo Station. The Lower Marsh section of this corridor boasts a weekday, hot food and craft daytime street market that acts as a major magnet for many of the area's office workers.

Due to the ease at which people can travel into Waterloo, the area is full of large and small offices with a population that swells during popular days within the working week and contracts during the weekend. Most visitors to the area constitute the afterwork crowd, or those that are frequenting Waterloo's fringe theatre and dining options.

The residential population runs the full gamut, from social housing stock to high-end heritage area houses. Waterloo does not boast having a nightlife that runs much later than 10 or 11pm as most of the area shuts down by the time the clock strikes 12.

### Key opportunities/challenges

Waterloo is a complex neighbourhood with many different competing audiences and interests. Although Waterloo is centrally located within London, it is often a destination *afterthought* for local or international visitors.

Waterloo's geography is its own worst enemy as the area contains large vacuous roads that slice up

vital areas of the neighbourhood, creating dissonance and discord which interrupts the creative and charming flow. It is due to this noise, and several other compelling factors, that we at the WeAreWaterloo Business Improvement District decided to embark upon a placemaking strategy at the start of January 2022.

The strategy had many intentions, one of which was to increase connectivity of the area in both a concrete and abstract manner. It also aimed to combat the lack of green space and provide opportunities for greenery to develop. A destination marketing component was certainly at the forefront of the work; however, the destination marketing piece itself would not be able to be fully complete without an accompanying identity-based workstream, designed to better understand what Waterloo is as a place, what it represents to those near and far from it, and how that message can be packaged and communicated in an attractive and inviting manner.

The WAW BID put together a project brief in Autumn 2021, interviewed consultant teams over that winter period and selected architect and design firm [Allies and Morrison](#) as partners in the work during December 2021. Once work kicked off, priorities of the placemaking strategy were drilled down to include:

1. Identify public realm opportunities
2. Bring existing public realm projects to the front line
3. Define Waterloo as a place
4. Realise avenues for destination marketing
5. Embed ambitions into the development agenda
6. Address retail pressures
7. Provide a set of placemaking principles

### Goals/objectives

The goal of the strategy has been to identify how Waterloo's past can provide ways to inform Waterloo's future. It has looked at the current makeup of Waterloo: what is and is not working and how these things could be improved upon.

Waterloo's future goals are to:

- Be a better-connected neighbourhood, twofold: both in the ways that communities work in harmony with one another as well as the way in which sub-districts of the neighbourhood are connected through to one another.
- Segment the area into these defined individual places, or sub-districts, and determine how these sub-districts could offer value when looking for avenues to promote Waterloo as a place and when creating suitable and context-specific projects.
- Offer a more visually pleasing welcome at the neighbourhood gateway, which for most is the departure from Waterloo Station onto Waterloo Road. At the moment, this road is quite congested, polluted, gray, dirty and unwelcoming.

- Make it onto the mental map of Londoners as a destination for independent arts and entertainment, a variety of dining options and an unexpected array of characterful-leisure options.
- Shout more loudly about the resources and assets within Waterloo - such as its strong arts community and independent spirit - to contribute towards creating a more solid identity for the area.
- Embed ambitions for the neighborhood into the development agenda by staying aware of what's coming and broadcasting area priorities to those in charge of making decisions related to large-scale changes.
- Improve walkability of the area by carving out more obvious walking routes from one destination to the next.
- Come closer to defining Waterloo's 'Big Idea' - what makes Waterloo tick and what is the way to describe the beating heart of Waterloo? Utilise outcomes from this exercise to inform decisions made around place brand and place narrative.

## Description of the project/initiative

### Description of the project/initiative

By July 2022, the strategy was finalised as a dense, 63-page document that was segmented into three separate chapters:

1. Waterloo Is... - A celebration of Waterloo's history, people, and assets. Here, insights from the consultants' survey and research data are extrapolated to articulate how Waterloo continues to be a community minded hub of creativity, culture, activity, and learning.
2. Waterloo Could... - Recommendations on the ways in which Waterloo could improve by addressing the challenges that it faces.
3. Make it Happen... - Over 150 public realm and placemaking activation project recommendations, all designed with the intention of delivering positive change within Waterloo.

WeAreWaterloo celebrated the completion of the work by embarking upon an engagement tour to obtain stakeholder feedback and to see which of the 150 projects to begin prioritizing. This tour included separate meetings with the WAW board, a resident's association and the placemaking steering group. The process then wrapped up with a member exhibition at a local gallery that invited the community out for commentary. Since wrapping up this process, the BID has launched several initiatives formed directly from the strategy, such as:

1. Marketing & Events - Connecting BID-based event series' with London's calendar of events (such as London Festival of Architecture, etc.), launching a student steering group in collaboration with London South Bank University, launching a promotional campaign with the tagline 'Waterloo...Who Knew??', installing a banner flag campaign on Waterloo Road which pays homage to Waterloo's charms, completing an organisational brand identity exercise and using this to influence to propel forward a full-scale [website redesign](#).
2. Placemaking Activation - Summer movie screening series on Lower Marsh which included offers from local businesses (and was recently featured in [Time Out Magazine](#)).

3. Public Realm Interventions – Creating a wayfinding walking trail connecting a nearby tube station to the Imperial War Museum, establishing four parklets on Lower Marsh, implementing additional neighbourhood planting in quieter corridors within the BID area, launching an enhanced cleaning regime on Waterloo Road i.e., the area’s gateway.
4. Lobbying – Working with the local councils on large scale impact improvements such as membership on the Waterloo Station Masterplan steering group.
5. Business Support Initiatives – Launching ‘Re-Design’ a grant funded storefront façade upgrade programme which is designed to offer businesses the opportunity to install physical shop upgrades such as new awnings, painting, lighting, window displays, etc.

## The team involved in the project/initiative

### Project/initiative team

#### WeAreWaterloo Business Improvement District Staff

- Natalie Raben, Chief Executive
- Alex Butt, Head of Public Realm
- Harrie Notton, Head of Marketing and Strategy

#### Waterloo Placemaking Strategy Steering Group

- Michael Johnson, Architect – NaganJohnson
- Dan Taylor, Programme Manager– (formerly) Southwark Council
- Jillian Houghton, Project Manager/Regeneration – Southwark Council
- Luuk Van Kessel, Principal Transport Planner – Lambeth Council
- Eddie Nelms, Placemaking Specialist – (formerly) JLL
- Charles Graham, Marketing Academic/Associate Professor – London South Bank University
- Felicity Maries, Community & Families Manager/National Lead Practitioner for Family Support – (formerly) OASIS
- Andrew Hiley, Principal Planner – TFL
- Patrick Clark, Communications and Engagement Manager – TFL
- David Clarson, Secretariat – South Bank and Waterloo Neighbours Local Forum
- Carlo Gargiulo, Property Services Manager – Network Rail
- Liz Sillett, Director of Operations and External Relationships – The Old Vic

#### Allies & Morrison Staff

- Eric Hallquist, Landscape Architect
- Imogen Blaikie, Urban Planner

- Jacob Neville, Associate Urban Designer

#### London South Bank University Marketing Student Co-hort

As part of the work for the strategy, WAW BID teamed up with Dr. Charles Graham of London South Bank University (LSBU) to work with students by creating an assignment that formed their marketing module for the term.

For this, four seminars' worth of marketing students were allocated to teams, each of which were given a pre-defined place within the WAW district. The teams were then asked to discover, understand, and describe the character of this place/sub-district. Various aspects of place were also provided to the students as part of this, which they would need to be considering, measuring, or evaluating. Within the places/sub-districts brief, students were provided with benchmark locations which they then had to visit and carry out surveys within, enabling them to make useful comparisons.

Using the data collected and drawing on their own knowledge of brand management, students were then tasked with developing a brand identity for their selected place that would reflect an extended target market and positioning. This could then be used to manage and promote that location within the WAW BID identity. The brand identity would then have to be articulated in the form of a fifteen-minute presentation, with space for questions afterward, to an audience of LSBU staff, WAW staff and A&M staff.

## Impact or outcomes

#### Short-term outcomes/achievements

In the short term, the placemaking strategy seeks to accomplish the following:

- Add pops of colour to Waterloo with easy to implement interventions such as banner flags or storefront upgrades.
- Extend the reach and build the Waterloo fanbase through compelling and on-brand decisions on digital and social media. Use these channels to share more about the 'hidden gems' of Waterloo by offering insider peaks at these unknown places.
- Become a more embedded part of the London mental map by working with pre-existing initiatives – such as London Festival or Architecture, New London Architecture or PRIDE – to pitch and establish events or programmes that unveil Waterloo to new, built in audiences.
- Implement quick wins for the public realm such as pocket parks or small changes to unsightly streets that make these places more welcoming.
- Create a more reflective and enticing look and feel for the digital presence of the Waterloo brand.
- Tap into the area assets of Waterloo as a means of championing what's already there and establishing new and unique ways to shout about these more loudly to new and unaware external audiences.

### Long-term outcomes/achievements

In the long term, the placemaking strategy seeks to accomplish the following:

- Embed the WAW BID into the development agenda and work closely with those interested in breaking ground in Waterloo to ensure that the BID's area objectives have the opportunity to become integrated into their work plans.
- Influence decisions made on how large-scale projects, such as the Waterloo Station Masterplan, get implemented.
- Find more concrete ways to connect the community by working with partners to improve wayfinding, walkability, navigability, and overall neighbourhood safety.
- Improve overall area desirability by focusing on efforts that improve area safety, public perception, and area vibrancy.
- Work with partners to establish Waterloo as a leader in climate-minded actions and initiatives.
- If all development goes according to plan, Waterloo will have 20,000 new workers heading to the area during the working week over the next ten years. Knowing this, devise capacity planning programmes and initiatives that anticipate how to successfully plan for this level of tremendous growth.



Visual



The not-so-obvious London destination



Using the feedback received across all forms of engagement, the following place narrative statement has been devised which helps to set out Waterloo's identity, pulling out the aspects which differentiates it from other London neighbourhoods.



An unlikely combination of assets coming together to attract a diverse and quirky crowd...

Waterloo sits at the heart of London, a short walk away from many of London's main attractions. As a major transport hub, it is both easy to get to and from, but it is by no means transient. Despite its Zone 1 location, it is one of the few remaining central London neighbourhoods which has kept its authentic, unpretentious London charm, 'village' feel, and close-knit community, whilst embracing change and progress.

An authentic London neighbourhood community in Zone 1...



A consistently welcoming place, regardless of who you are...

Waterloo performs many roles all at once - a business district, a cultural destination, a place to study and learn, a place to live, and a place to visit and enjoy. Throughout all of these roles, Waterloo retains a quirky edge - it's not overly commercial, it's not overladen with tourist attractions, it's not in your face about its brilliant alternative cultural offer, it's not dominated by expensive flats, it's not an obvious student or commuter hangout, and yet it effortlessly provides for businesses, workers, residents, visitors and students alike.

Culture with a small 'c'...



A pretty mess, a bit scruffy but that's okay...

Waterloo isn't always the obvious choice, but maybe it's for this reason it has managed to remain a consistently welcoming and enjoyable place to be, regardless of who you are or what your budget is. Where else in London can you find such a diverse array of high quality food, drinks, culture, activities and places to stay without needing to fight through crowds, wait in queues, or break the bank?

London's best kept secret...



When it comes to Waterloo, it helps to be 'in the know'. The cultural venues hidden behind unassuming doors, the authentic eateries concealed in one of Waterloo's proper pubs, the moments of respite in a tranquil green space, much of which relies on word of mouth.

Rebellious with a small 'r'...



Its inherent informal and sometimes unkempt appearance and character, born out of its diversity in buildings, spaces and neighbourhoods and their varying degrees of age, style and maintenance, provides the perfect setting and framework for the fringe culture which it nurtures. Waterloo, in its loosely managed setting, provides the breathing space and opportunity for creative rebellion, as witnessed in the street art of Lower Marsh, the guerrilla gardening on Westminster Bridge Road, and the Vault's alternative theatre experience hosted inside Waterloo's disused railway arches.

Where encountering the unexpected is still possible.



You might think you know everything that Waterloo has to offer, but you're likely to encounter the unexpected at any given turn - Leake Street graffiti tunnel, Isabella Street's green oasis, Make Space Studios' elevated enclave of colour and creativity - all make Waterloo a vibrant, lively and interesting place to spend time.

This page sets out the five key placemaking themes with the accompanying principles which have helped to inform and shape the ideas and projects in this report. Guidance on how some of these principles could be delivered in a high quality and effective way, whilst responding to local character, can be found in the guidance section at the end of this report.

<p><b>IDENTITY</b></p> <p>Celebrate the things that make Waterloo <i>Waterloo</i></p>	<p>Support Waterloo's diversity by championing independent businesses and inclusivity</p>	<p>Promote, protect and create opportunities for creativity</p>	<p>Promote Waterloo's cultural institutions</p>	<p>Promote and protect Waterloo's historic assets</p>	<p>Example projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wayfinding</li> <li>• Public Art</li> <li>• Shopfronts</li> <li>• Heritage highlighting</li> </ul>
<p><b>ACTIVATION</b></p> <p>Reinforce Waterloo's sense of place through animation and activation</p>	<p>Activate underutilised spaces for the benefit of all</p>	<p>Animate blank façades and frontages along key streets</p>	<p>Create a diverse and inclusive programme of events and activities which aligns with Waterloo's identity</p>	<p>Consider temporary activation and urban play as a way to create activity for all</p>	<p>Example projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Events</li> <li>• Planters/parklets</li> <li>• Street furniture</li> </ul>
<p><b>PUBLIC REALM</b></p> <p>Create healthy and inclusive streets and spaces, designed for a changing climate</p>	<p>Seek opportunities for improving biodiversity, air quality, drainage, and wellbeing through greening</p>	<p>Improve inclusivity, sense of safety, and wellbeing through lighting, activation, street furniture and cleaning</p>	<p>Improve legibility and sense of place through signage and wayfinding</p>	<p>Make streets feel more like places</p>	<p>Example projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streetscape</li> <li>• Greening &amp; SuDS</li> <li>• Street lighting</li> <li>• Material upgrades</li> <li>• Cleaning and waste</li> </ul>
<p><b>CONNECTIVITY</b></p> <p>Help to create safe and intuitive movement and exploration in Waterloo</p>	<p>Address issues of severance caused by transport infrastructure</p>	<p>Create intuitive wayfinding and opportunities for exploration</p>	<p>Encourage active travel by making it easy</p>	<p>Enhance Waterloo's gateways and thresholds to create a positive arrival experience</p>	<p>Example projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New connections</li> <li>• Crossings</li> <li>• Sustainable transport</li> </ul>
<p><b>BRAND</b></p> <p>Strengthen Waterloo's brand through promotion of its unique assets</p>	<p>Promote Waterloo's excellent and distinctive pubs</p>	<p>Promote Waterloo's impressive food and drink as a catalyst for other activities such as its rich cultural offer</p>	<p>Collaborate with institutions and businesses who are part of Waterloo's identity</p>	<p>Engage in London-wide activities which promote Waterloo's cultural scene</p>	<p>Example projects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marketing</li> <li>• Promotion</li> </ul>

REVEALING WATERLOO August 2022

15

## Redesign Project Updates



We have already seen a number of success stories brightening up the area's shopfronts. A number of projects are expected to be completed within the coming weeks, whereas some recipients have requested deadline extensions. After the first funding round is complete a detailed case study will be produced.

Further grant funding is now open on a rolling basis.

Some key project statistics:

- Total spend (so far) - £18,750
- Total commitments - £45,000
- Number of renovations completed - 8
- Number of renovations planned/ongoing - 7

## Advice for High Streets Task Force users

### Advice/key learning

When looking to engage in a placemaking strategy, it's important to take time in the lead up to fully map out exactly what your objectives are, including all of the reasons for why you are undertaking this exercise in the first place. If you enter into this process wanting to be led instead of leading, then you will end up disappointed in the end as you will be working to someone else's agenda.

WAW BID was fortunate enough to be in a financial position to be able to fund all of the work independently and therefore did not have to be reliant on partners who would then have the power to influence the outcome. It's also highly beneficial to choose to work with consultants, or an external team, that has a completely different set of skills than yourself and your team. Make sure that you choose those that possess the technical expertise which you may lack in-house so that their work will be able to complement your own internal contributions.

Take the process seriously and engage in regular check ins throughout the duration of the work that are scheduled in such a way that they don't feel like a chore but, instead, maintain a level of energy and momentum for the project.

It's also highly vital to be very precise with the timeframe in which you want the work to be completed within. For the BID, it was ideal for this exercise to be succinct and precise. Therefore, the project from start to finish was mapped out to take place over a three-month period. This was then moderately extended due to input required in the editing phase. However, the entire process did not exceed more than five months.

Most importantly, make sure that you walk away with an action-filled document that you can start implementing immediately.

# Contact for Task Force queries

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## Further details

### Further details

Here are relevant links to tell you more about the strategy:

[WeAreWaterloo BID website](#)

[Placemaking Strategy](#)

[Re-Design Initiative](#)

[WeAreWaterloo on TikTok](#)

[Allies and Morrison](#)