

# NLQ

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## POWER PLAYER

Battersea Power Station Development Company's Simon Murphy | Haptic Architects | Shaun Dawson | Kirsten Lees | Ros Morgan

# WEST END GIRL

Heart of London Business Alliance chief executive *Ros Morgan* extols the virtues of the West End and its 'galleries without walls'



What I love about London's West End is the diversity of the people and the energy and creativity that brings.

Ever since the Theatre Royal opened on Drury Lane in 1663, the West End has become one of the most culturally rich areas in the world. Over the centuries, Piccadilly Circus, Leicester Square, St Martin's Lane and St James's have all grown to have their own distinct and iconic identities. Throughout these destinations, you can find thespians, pub landlords, film stars, smart suits, black cabbies, sightseers, royal warrant-holders, gamblers... it's got it all!

Originally from Belfast, I grew up during the Troubles, a million miles away from the glitz and glamour of London's West End. I've lived here for over 20 years now, and like most people, have always been drawn to the 24/7 epicentre of cultural vibrancy. But it has taken me a while to really get under the skin of the area, in particular the art offering.

When I was younger, I always thought that art and galleries were quite intimidating and not for people like me, which I think many can relate to. The older institutions always felt fortress-like and inaccessible, which seemed jarring against the backdrop of a very progressive city.

As the chief executive of Heart of London Business Alliance, my role is to represent all businesses on our patch and lead us in championing the cultural and commercial wellbeing of the area, promoting it and ensuring we keep attracting more and more visitors. We have the Royal Academy, National Gallery, National Portrait Gallery, English National Opera... some incredible institutions all within our small but mighty patch of London.

Taking my love for the West End, and my own experience as a visitor, one thing that I'm passionate about, and am most proud of at Heart of London, is bringing art out on to the streets of the West End, democratising it and making it accessible to everyone.

Over the past few years, we've fostered opportunities and artwork that enable our wonderful institutions to spill out into this iconic destination and use art in all its forms to turn the West End into a vibrant 'gallery without walls'. We've created a cohesive art programme for the area, called Art of London, which links up the institutions and uses historic streets as the backdrop for a cultural experience, all to attract a new audience.

Since its launch, we've had mile-long art trails through the West End, we've blended contemporary works with Dutch classics in an augmented gallery, and even displayed selfies in the Piccadilly Lights!

I want people going out for a meal, visiting for the first time, or simply on the way to the tube to leave our area having experienced world-class art that is inclusive and accessible year-round.

And what better canvas for art than the West End? ●



A gallery without walls — painted pedestrian crossings in the West End