Tips for Night Audits

What is a night audit?

A night audit is an assessment of a public space to understand how different people use and experience it between 6pm and 6am.

Why carry out a night audit?

Experience a place at night **first hand**

Experience how its **atmosphere and use changes** over time

Form an understanding that is **people and experience-led**

Encourage **engagement with public space** and a sense of collective stewardship

Exchange knowledge between designers, planners and those with day-to-day experience of the place at night

Build a **sense of community** and create new connections

Learn about **how others experience** or perceive a place at night

Allow users of the space to **discuss their needs** with decision makers in person

Provide compelling, **place-specific evidence** for funding applications and briefs

1:1 Discuss and begin to test ideas at a **tangible 1:1 scale**

Things to consider when preparing your audit

Carry out a dry run and consider...

- When do nearby businesses close?
- When does it get dark?
- How long will the audit take?
- How many people can safely and comfortably participate?
- How would I answer this audit question myself?
- How would I use the answers to inform actions and decisions?

Ensure audit sites and materials are accessible...

Ask attendees in advance if they have access requirements and ensure printed materials are legible after dark.

When discussing safety...

Frame questions in a nuanced way that will help inform actions and note that attendees might feel safer by being in a group during the audit. Rather than asking "Do you feel safe?", you could ask:

- "Are there people nearby who could see or hear you if you needed help?"
- "Does the space feel well looked after?"
- "Is there a mix of people out and about and does this feel like a space that's welcoming to everyone?"
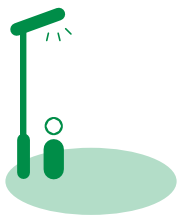
When discussing lighting...

Focus on the *effects* of light rather than lighting itself. For example, you could ask:

- "Can you comfortably see the space and people around you?"
- "Can you see things and people in the distance?"
- "Does the space look as welcoming and attractive as it does by day?"

Try to avoid steering perceptions...

For example, instead of asking about 'noise', which has negative associations, you could ask:

- "Does the quality of sound in this space contribute positively or negatively to the atmosphere?"
- "Is the volume too quiet, too loud, or about right?"

Groups to invite

Aim for 6-12 attendees per group, with each group including at least one facilitator, depending on the activity.

Night audits are opportunities to understand a broader range of experiences of a place at night, so consider inviting underrepresented groups, such as:

A diverse mix of local business owners and residents, including young people

Night workers who experience public spaces at night as part of their work or commute

Disabled people, people in low income households and women who do not feel as safe in London at night compared to Londoners as a whole*

Deaf, blind and partially sighted people who can be disproportionately affected by poor lighting, and **neurodiverse people** who can be more sensitive to lights and sounds and may prefer access to quiet and calm spaces

People who use mobility aids who might take different routes at night and have difficulty accessing amenities, services and venues

*London at Night, GLA, 2018

Examples — audits on site

Tagging

Residents were invited to tag and photograph elements of their neighbourhood according to how they influenced their perceptions of safety after dark. They used red tags to highlight detrimental aspects and green for positive. Participants then shared their tagged photographs and explained their reasoning in a workshop.

Gamification

Making audits fun helps keep people engaged, encourage them to explore a place or see it in new ways. The example here - 'Audit Bingo' - asked participants to find different features open and accessible at night. These included: attractive walking routes; safe bike parking; a music venue; healthy food; a phone charger; a family-friendly venue; a meeting point; a nightclub; a toilet; a 'hidden gem'; and a place to shelter from rain at night.

Examples — follow-up workshops

Lighting workshops

A team of lighting designers, social researchers and residents conducted audits and workshops to test lighting improvements on the Whitecross Estate. Residents brought detailed local knowledge, social researchers shaped the audits and lighting designers worked with residents to test proposals.

Collective mapping

Once your on-site audit is done, consider concluding with a mapping exercise to record discussions and agree priorities. Use different colours and/or shapes of stickers to mark up a map of the area you've audited and ask participants to suggest their top three priorities or projects.

Candlelit workshop

Studio Dekka facilitated a candlelit workshop in a vacant shop unit to workshop ideas for a lighting strategy. The lighting created an evocative ambience and helped set the scene for the project.