



# DAVID LEAN CINEMA

STRATEGY 2025-2027



# DLC

STRATEGY 2025-2027

# FOREWORD

**JOANNA SCANLAN, DLC PATRON**

As all of our cultural activities emerge from these painful last few years of arts cuts and pandemic isolation, a recent entertainment podcast has it that cinema is newly proving to be a thrilling art form to young audiences. Those educated in the lonely consumption of “content” on individual screens are said to be beginning to experience how wonderful watching films alongside other humans can be! The DLC puts this very magic of cinema as a cornerstone of its new strategy.

Cinema takes us to emotional pinnacles instantly. Watching a film, we enter the wizardry of filmmakers and camaraderie of our fellow filmgoers. The humour, terror and greatest joy found on cinema screens chime profoundly with our own lives. But not always, and where there is disjunction, there follows an opportunity for understanding of others. Having been patron of the David Lean Cinema, this year has been great fun and a privilege. I can see that the engagement and participation of the committee, programmers, volunteers and patrons is deeply rewarding for all. I marvel at the smooth running and warm welcome offered to anyone who finds their way to the Clocktower. Come and have a drink, a natter and watch a brilliant movie. Let’s talk films. It’s better together.

# VALUING OUR PAST

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# AMBITIOUS FOR OUR FUTURE

# DLC

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We celebrated in 2024.

Our small, independent, volunteer-led cinema in central Croydon marked its 10th anniversary as the place to be, to see the very best of British and world film.

We are proud of our achievement, not least, in times of austerity. And we have managed our way out of COVID. It has been a steep learning curve, but we are the stronger for it.

Now, we look to the future. We are ambitious. We believe that the David Lean Cinema (DLC) can continue to grow and to prosper, to be a beacon of progressive independent cinema in Croydon and beyond.



**THE  
DAVID LEAN  
CINEMA**

NO ORDINARY FILMS, NO ORDINARY CINEMA

**10  
YEARS**

# OUR HISTORY

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# OUR VALUES

The David Lean Cinema started life at Croydon Clocktower in 1995 as a place where locals and visitors could come together and enjoy extraordinary films. Sadly, the cinema was closed in 2011 by Croydon Council, but that didn't stop us from bringing unforgettable cinema to the heart of Croydon. From December 2011 to January 2014, we screened around 70 films at the Spread Eagle on Katharine Street, and other local venues, establishing the David Lean Cinema as a cultural community staple and building a significant fanbase. As a result, Croydon Council invited us back to the Clocktower to present films in our cosy, 68-seater cinema. In 2015, we officially registered the cinema as a Community Interest Company (CIC). Today, we screen more than 20 films each month, ranging from cult classics to the latest blockbusters, as well as stunning world cinema, the best of British, sing-alongs, and more. Without our passionate and dedicated team of volunteers, the David Lean Cinema simply wouldn't function. It's our love of community and thirst for quality films that has made our little cinema persevere.

We will continue to value and to promote:

- **The life-enhancing experience of cinema**
- **The treasure-trove of global film**
- **Diversity and inclusivity: in our community, our audience, and our volunteers**
- **Audience and volunteer well-being**
- **Environmental responsibility**
- **David Lean's legacy**

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# DAVID LEAN CINEMA

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Our values translate into our Vision and Mission for DLC.

## OUR VISION

To enrich lives through the magic of cinema

## OUR MISSION

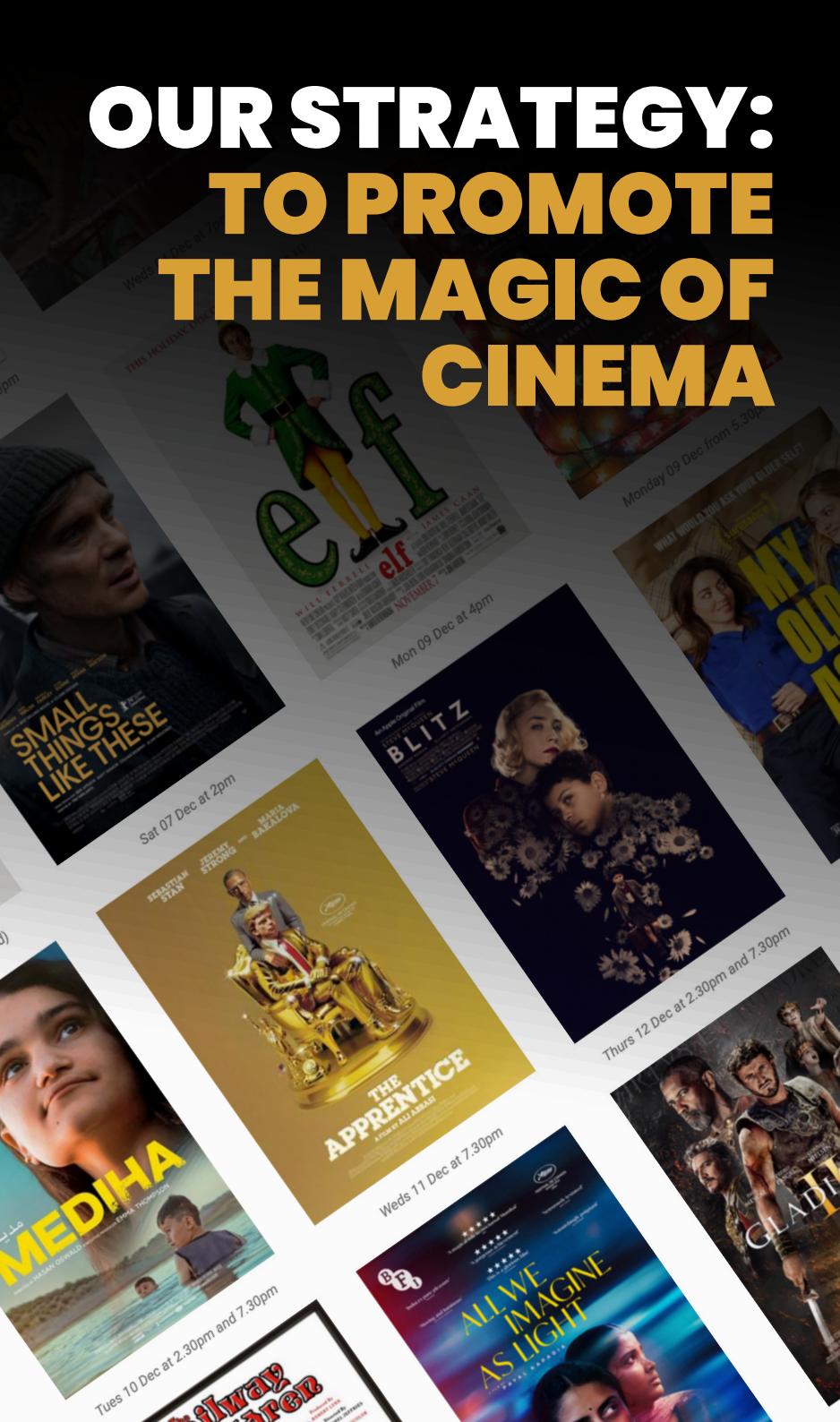
To promote British and world film, grow and diversify our audience, and sustain our volunteer-led, community cinema.

## OUR PRIORITIES

Reflecting our Mission, the DLC Strategy 2025-2027 has five priorities:

- 1. To promote the magic of cinema**
- 2. To grow and diversify our audience**
- 3. To strengthen and value our team of volunteers**
- 4. To be environmentally responsible**
- 5. To be financially viable**

# OUR STRATEGY: TO PROMOTE THE MAGIC OF CINEMA



## Imaginative Programming

Film is global. It is for all ages and for all people.

DLC showcases the richness and the diversity of British and world film. This is our hallmark; our raison d'être.

We present over 20 screenings a month. From January 2023 to the end of June 2024, 284 films were shown; 72 were foreign language films, in 23 different languages.

Our films are predominantly current releases, but classic re-releases and other notable older films are represented too. We curate film weeks, be that to showcase the work of directors from a particular country or to celebrate diversity for LGBT+ and Black History Month events. We mark Holocaust Memorial Day. We have popular question and answer (Q &A) screenings, where actors, producers, musicians, and screenwriters, enter into dialogue with our audience.

35mm films are shown, often in association with The Cinema Museum but sometimes, independently. Every four to six weeks, films are shown on a Monday for free, as part of the British Film Institute's (BFI) Escape to the Cinema programme. A monthly post-film discussion takes place in association with Croydon's U3A film group.

Our approach to programming has stood the test of time. It is a robust model. But there is always room for improvement.

## We will:

Identify films and programmes of film with the potential to attract new audiences.

Strengthen the pool of DLC volunteers with a broad knowledge of film.

Be proactive and receptive to the ideas of both volunteers and DLC patrons in identifying film genres and film directors of interest.

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# OUR STRATEGY: TO PROMOTE THE MAGIC OF CINEMA



Tilda Swinton

## More Screenings

We intend to expand the number of film screenings, on days and at times that better fit the lifestyles and work patterns of some of our patrons, for example, in the late afternoon or early evening, after work or college. We will reassess the implications of the patterns of filmgoing in the summer of 2025.

In 2023, 71% of our screenings were on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Excluding BFI Escape films, over the 18 months to June 2024, there was a single screening on a Monday, 33 on Wednesday, six on Friday and 24 on Saturday.

Notionally, there is time and space to do more. We recognise the desirability of opening on Friday and Saturday evenings but Croydon Clocktower's opening hours and Croydon Council's security provision currently makes this difficult. More screenings also require more volunteer time (box office, Arts Bar, stewards, and projectionists). It assumes too, that more films can be identified, and their distribution rights negotiated. There will be added work to meet encryption requirements and to provide script and cue guidance for our projectionists.

That said, a more balanced weekly programme of films is a worthwhile objective. It is part of growing our audience and offering as comprehensive a range of British and world cinema as possible.

## We will:

Examine the feasibility of increasing the number of DLC screenings, spread across more days of the week and at different times of the day. This will require discussion both with Croydon Council, our volunteers, and our paid staff.

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# OUR STRATEGY: TO GROW AND DIVERSIFY OUR AUDIENCE

## Our First Priority

**The existence, the location and the wealth of films shown at DLC is not widely known. For our cinema to prosper, culturally and financially, this has to change.**

From January 2023 to June 2024, TicketSource data records that 36.7% of our screenings attracted an audience of fewer than 27 people, the break-even point for a single screening.

Although our audience database is limited, we know and value our core group of loyal patrons, some of whom have been coming to our cinema since the 1990s when Croydon Council ran the DLC. We know too that a significant percentage of our audience are over 65; senior-priced tickets made up 55% of our ticket sales in FY 2023/24. And a rough estimate suggests that approximately 55% of our patrons come from two Croydon post-code areas, CR0 and CR2.

It follows that our audience profile is geographically narrow, and skewed, to a degree, to the older generation. We need more patrons from a wider base, within Croydon and beyond, from all ages, and across our diverse communities.

As Croydon is home to over 390,000 people, London's most populous borough, potentially we have a large untapped audience on our doorstep.

If we add in our six adjacent boroughs (1.4 million people), our latent market is considerable.

And we live in an ethnically diverse society. Nearly 48% of Croydon's residents identify themselves (2021 census) as Black (27%), Asian (17.5%) or from mixed or multiple ethnic groups (7.6%); communities with their own film heritage and genres.

**So, we should become better known: our films, our cinema, and who we are.**

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Adam Pearson

# OUR STRATEGY: TO GROW AND DIVERSIFY OUR AUDIENCE

## Smart Communication

To communicate our existence and our programmes effectively involves publicity, targeting and outreach. Publicity to ensure that we reach the widest possible audience; targeting that engages with specific communities, groups, associations and institutions; and outreach that explores and generates formal and informal partnerships. None of these activities are new, but we are working to draw them together as part of an overall communication strategy.

## Publicity

Effective publicity is key.

We are creating a memorable, instantly recognisable visual identity for DLC, in ways that will build awareness of our existence and of our cultural worth across Croydon and beyond.

In 2025, our website will be the hub for everything we do. It will be simple to access and to navigate. Our social media outlets (Facebook, Instagram, Bluesky, LinkedIn, Letterbox) will lead back to the website, for ticket sales and to encourage conversations about film. It will share ideas about the DLC experience and highlight the benefits of volunteering.

We will continue to promote DLC on Google and Trip Advisor and through media and press outlets. Our newsletter account now handles thousands of sign-ups for our weekly online newsletter.

Against this backdrop, we will review our more traditional publicity strategies. Our monthly programme pamphlet distribution and its impact on ticket sales will be assessed; so too, the potential to increase programme poster coverage.

In partnership with Croydon Council, we will build on recent improvements in DLC signage within and outside the Clocktower.

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# OUR STRATEGY: TO GROW AND DIVERSIFY OUR AUDIENCE

## Targeting and Outreach

**We are keen to draw into our world of film, a diversity of communities, groups and institutions, in addition to targeting individual patrons.**

This is not a new idea. But it will be important going forward to make careful choices as to where our effort (which is time intensive) has the greatest potential to increase and diversify our audience.

There are opportunities to work with (and in some cases re-engage) with secondary schools, colleges, and universities, especially where film and media studies are part of their curriculum or of their extra curricula activities. Our experience to date shows that is a time-consuming and challenging objective.

We have worked for some time with groups and associations (Age UK Croydon, Mind in Croydon, Croydon Voluntary Action, Croydon Dementia Action Alliance, Croydon Active Voices and Club Soda Croydon) for our dementia friendly, and relaxed screenings. Babes in Arms screenings are important to DLC too.

Croydon, and South London more generally, has a vibrant and diverse cultural scene. We are in touch with a number of such groups. The potential to develop these relationships from information exchange to partnerships which foster joint activities will continue to

be an important strand of our work going forward.

We have yet to establish close relationships with major public and private employers in Croydon. Potentially, they offer opportunities for raising our profile, increasing our audience and – if appropriate – sponsoring DLC events.

Beyond Croydon, links with BFI and The Cinema Museum will continue.

More pragmatically, there are numerous groups within our Borough – community associations, church groups, environmental groups – with whom we can engage.

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# OUR STRATEGY: TO GROW AND DIVERSIFY OUR AUDIENCE

## The David Lean Cinema Experience

We value our audience. Their experience of our cinema matters.

Technically, we plan to upgrade our Dolby sound system. We are considering too, the installation of a new screen, and fixing our curtains and side-masking. And we are improving the equipment needed for our Q&A sessions.

Many of our regular patrons see DLC as more than an auditorium in which to watch a film. They see it as a place to meet, 'a form of club.' The atmosphere which we create in the Arts Bar is important. Our welcome sets the tone.

Efforts will continue to be made to improve what we can offer, in terms of food, drink and comfort, despite the space and other constraints within the Clocktower. And we will be proactive in seeking out our patrons ideas on how to enhance the David Lean Cinema experience.

## A Membership Scheme

There are views, both for and against, the introduction of a DLC membership scheme. We will re-assess the rationale for, and the practicality of such a scheme, recognising that there are a range of different models that could be introduced.

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## We will:

Improve our audience data-base.

Consult on, and implement, a joined-up communication strategy, the impact of which will be measured by the growth and the diversity of our audience, and by the range of our cultural partnerships in Croydon and beyond.

Constantly assess and improve the David Lean 'experience,' its welcome, its services and our responsiveness to the views and ideas of our patrons.



# OUR STRATEGY: TO STRENGTHEN & VALUE OUR TEAM OF VOLUNTEERS

# OUR VOLUNTEERS ARE THE LIFELOOD OF THE DAVID LEAN CINEMA. THEY MAKE IT TICK.

In 2024, 84 volunteers were working with and for DLC. Encouragingly, there was a waiting list. Of the volunteers who worked in the box office and the Arts Bar, or as stewards and projectionists, 57% were women, 43% men.

Younger volunteers are joining and our team is becoming more ethnically diverse. These are trends which we will actively promote in the next three years.

## Giving Voice

DLC's management committee is mainly comprised of volunteers. But there is scope for more listening and learning from all of our volunteers, both on DLC strategies going forward but especially on good practice in the different roles that volunteers fulfil, including the promotion of DLC in their own neighbourhoods.

Other ways of giving voice include focus groups on specific topics or the establishment of a small volunteers' council. Alternatively, a regular online survey of our volunteer's opinions and ideas would be productive.

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All of Us Strangers walking tour

# OUR STRATEGY: TO STRENGTHEN & VALUE OUR TEAM OF VOLUNTEERS

## Making Life Easier

There is the potential to improve the life of the Arts Bar and box office volunteers in small ways, in terms of paperwork, storage, keys and security, and waste bins. We are constrained somewhat by the layout of the Arts Bar, its storage spaces and equipment, but modest improvements will continue to be made.

## Recognition

DLC volunteers are and do feel valued. But we cannot take this for granted. Social gatherings are one expression of this recognition. Other ways deserve consideration, including recognition of long service, pen portraits on the website and the weekly newsletter, and the occasional off-site event, cultural or otherwise.

## Succession Planning

DLC is blessed with a community of enthusiasts, some of whom play critical roles in film selection, the technical operation of the cinema, the management of volunteers and in our external relations and partnerships. Many of these volunteers have served DLC for most, if not all, of our cinema's 10 year existence. It will be important to ensure that their professional and technical knowledge and experience is passed on through well-managed succession planning.

## We will:

Work to grow and diversify our volunteer force.

Build on existing good practice in volunteer recruitment, induction and management, learning from the experience and the ideas of our volunteers, in formal and informal ways.

Find and institute imaginative ways of recognising and valuing our team of volunteers.

Define the ways and means of ensuring effective succession planning.

# DLC



# **OUR STRATEGY: TO BE ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE**

**The Arts Council has four investment principles, one of which is environmental responsibility.**

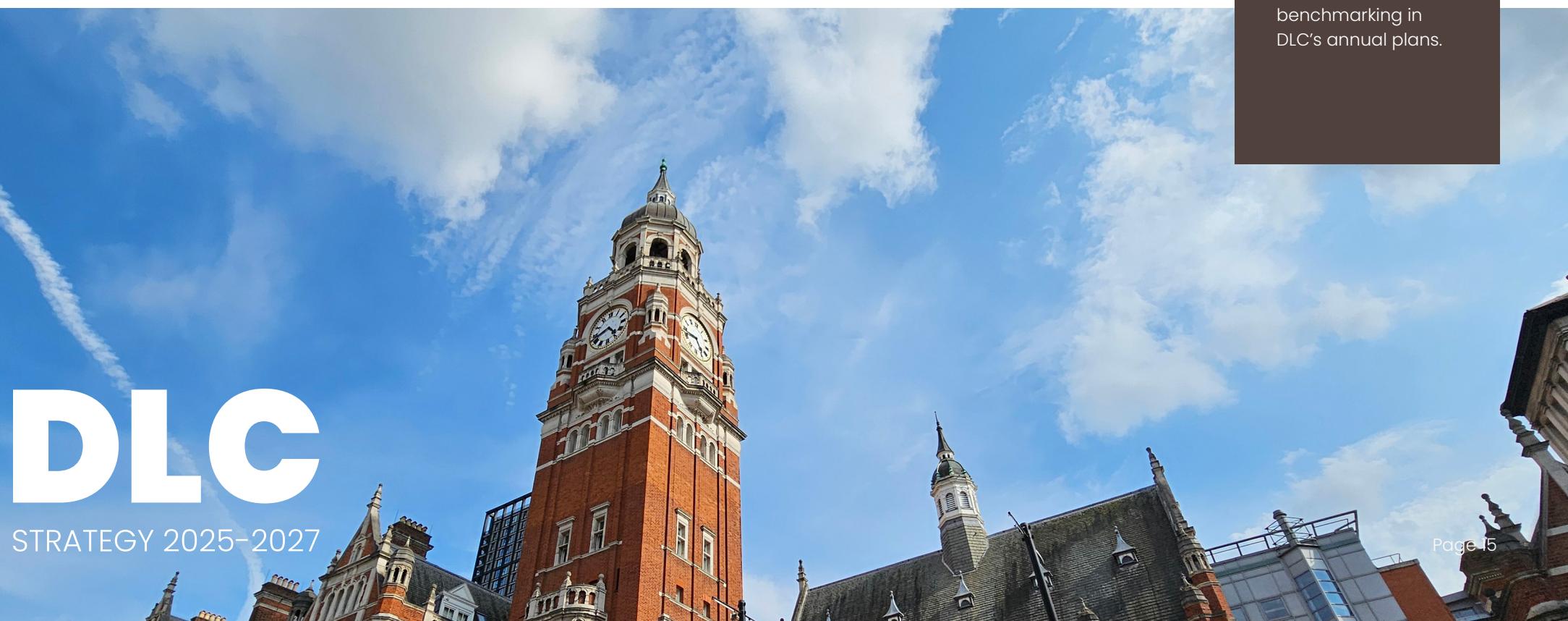
The BFI promotes good environmental practice, sharing resources for the film sector, including green cinema toolkits.

It is important that we play our part. To this end, we have recruited a volunteer Environmental Officer to help us to promote best practice consistent with environmental legislation.

An environmental audit will be our starting point. What do we do well, where can we improve and how can we demonstrate that environmental responsibility is a DLC hallmark. This study will have to be undertaken in close cooperation with Croydon Council, given its overall environmental responsibilities for the Clocktower.

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# OUR STRATEGY: TO BE ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE



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The findings of the audit will inform the development of our own environmental policy and programmes of work.

This is likely to include: the efficient use of materials and resources in all of our work; the promotion of environmental awareness across our volunteers; good recycling practice; and the creation of an awareness in Croydon Council, our patrons and the public more generally, that DLC takes its environment responsibilities seriously.

While we are aware of environmental issues, we have yet to codify an approach to DLC's environmental responsibilities. Now is the time.

## We will:

Conduct an environmental audit and have a DLC environmental policy in place in the first half of 2025, developed in association with Croydon Council.

Incorporate specific lines of environmental action and benchmarking in DLC's annual plans.



# OUR STRATEGY: TO BE FINANCIALLY VIABLE

To achieve our primary objectives requires a sound business model. Our survival and development as a cinema requires financial stability.

To this end, we plan to grow our income and carefully manage our outgoings, without sacrificing the quality of our programmes and the DLC experience.

## Growing Our Income

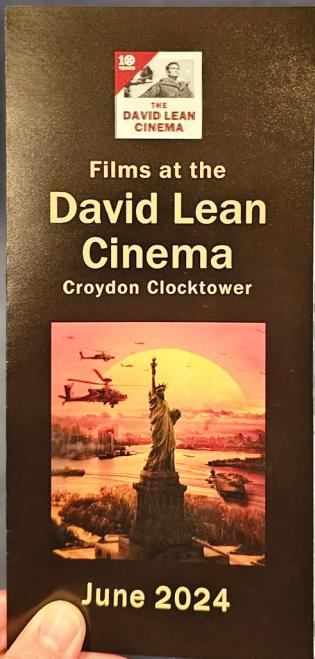
Ticket sales provide our main source of income; 80% in FY 2023/24.

This revenue stream will increase in proportion to our audience growth. We will continue to price our tickets competitively, including to offer concessions for those who are 65 or over, 25 or under, students, people with a disability, and those in receipt of Pension Credit, Universal Credit, Income Support or Job Seekers allowance.

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# OUR STRATEGY: TO BE FINANCIALLY VIABLE



We have Outreach and Fundraising Volunteers. This enables us to give attention to other sources of income, including events such as Q&A screenings, quiz nights, and film related walks, for example, around Sanderstead associated with the film All of Us Strangers.

Nine percent of our income in FY 2023/24 was from donations. This supported the purchase of a refurbished projector.

Sponsorship and grants offer further income raising opportunities. We loved the opportunity to contribute to Croydon's London Borough of Culture year (2023/24); and appreciated the associated grant.

Marketing DLC merchandise offers another modest revenue stream.

One important implication of an increase in income, is that DLC will cross the VAT threshold, the implications of which are under investigation.

## Managing Our Spending

As the history of DLC demonstrates, our cinema has operated on small margins. We will continue to review and ensure that we manage our spending efficiently and effectively.

In summary, we will continue to be a financially responsible, independent cinema.

## We will:

Create a rolling annual business and programme plan that sets out our income and outgoings, and the budgets required to deliver our 2025-2027 strategy.

Develop and deliver a DLC Fundraising Plan, to include bidding for grants.

Review our existing ticketing system, to determine how it can make ticket purchase simpler, support the use of gift vouchers, enable the use of a DLC membership scheme and offer merchandise for sale.

Develop a plan of action in the event of the VAT threshold being reached.

# DLC

# STRATEGIC WAYS OF WORKING

film

audience

volunteers

environment

financial viability

**We have a vision and a strong sense of mission from which five priorities have been identified: film, audience, volunteers, environment and financial viability, each with its own set of objectives and action points.**

Our strategic framework will translate into a rolling annual business and programme plan for the next three years, 2025–2027, which will set out our activities and their objectives, how they will be financed and delivered, and the ways in which they will be monitored, reviewed and assessed. They will make clear where accountability lies for the delivery on each of our five strategic priorities.

Crucially, delivery of our Strategic Plan will continue to require strong leadership and the effective use of the skills and the interests of all of our volunteers to achieve our mission objectives. Over the last ten years, DLC has relied heavily on a group of 'campaigners' who have invested their time and their energy beyond the call of duty. Building capacity, succession planning, and team management will require careful attention at the beginning of 2025.

In executing our strategy, we will work closely with Croydon Council, especially as this relates to our use of the Clocktower, its facilities, frequency of screenings, security and technical support. Cooperation will also continue to be sought to highlight and embed DLC's role in the overall development of the arts in the Borough of Croydon.

*Samantha Clark*

Chair, David Lean Cinema, January 2025

**DLC**

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# DAVID LEAN CINEMA

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Peter Bradshaw, Andrew Haigh and Joanna Scanlan



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