

## REPONSE TO THE BARBICAN ARTS CENTRE'S CONSULTATION ON THE "BARBICAN RENEWAL" PROJECT – PHASE ONE

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Thank you for inviting us to comment on your draft proposals for the first phase of Barbican Renewal. We understand that this is not a formal planning pre-application consultation, and on that basis our initial response is set out below. Even so, we would like to see a further level of detail and sufficient lead time for consultation responses to be incorporated before planning applications are submitted in the summer of 2025.
- 1.2 We agree that refurbishing the Barbican Arts Centre is essential, we appreciate the urgency, and we regret that this essential asset has been allowed to decline in recent years. In general the Forum is supportive of the works in phase one of Barbican Renewal. We remain concerned, however, that this project is being developed in the absence of an overall masterplan and listed building management guidelines, which we and others have been calling for since the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this world-famous neighbourhood, and which the City of London has long promised to commission.
- 1.3 The Arts Centre's wider programme remains opaque, significantly affecting our ability to comment on this first phase. We would appreciate more detail on the "five-year programme to forge the Centre's future" and how the funding of £191m from the City of London Corporation ("around 80% of the amount needed for the full five-year plan") will be invested. Presumably a reasonable level of detail is available in order to reach a funding settlement; greater transparency about what the Arts Centre has in mind is necessary in our view.
- 1.4 Throughout our response "the Barbican" refers to the entire estate, while "Arts Centre" refers to the current extent of the Barbican Arts Centre, including the cinema on Beech Street.

### 2 BGLNF response

#### 2.1 Masterplan

The Forum was set up partly in response to a wave of disconnected interventions and proposals for elements of the Barbican Estate. Some of these were damaging to the fabric, heritage and importance of the Barbican. We called for a masterplan to guide future development, and we consider that the Corporation should invest in this before moving ahead with further phases of Barbican Renewal beyond internal infrastructure upgrades.

#### 2.2 Listed Building Management Guidelines

It is concerning that works to the Arts Centre will be undertaken without any Listed Building Management Guidelines, and we recommend that these should be completed before the detailed plans are drawn up, and particularly before any further phases of work to the Arts Centre and Exhibition Halls are planned. Since 2005, when Avanti finished Guidelines for the Estate and its Landscape, the City of London has failed to meet its promise that "*Future volumes will provide management strategies for the following areas:*

*III A – Arts Centre [currently in development]*

*III B – Guildhall School of Music and Drama*

*III C – City of London School for Girls"*<sup>1</sup>

This failure, coupled with the history of damaging interventions, means that the Forum is a little sceptical of statements about the importance of the Barbican's heritage.

#### 2.3 Independent heritage review

In the absence of either Guidelines or an independent Design Review Panel in the City of London (which would normally offer constructive challenge to schemes such as this) we

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<sup>1</sup> Barbican & Golden Lane Conservation Area SPD "Management Strategy" p29

recommend that the Barbican Arts Centre involves an independent heritage design reviewer to provide assurance.

#### 2.4 Detail missing

There is nowhere near enough detail for a proper pre-app consultation, nor to allow the Forum to engage with the design evolution of the scheme in the way we would expect to.

#### 2.5 Foyers

As much effort should be made as possible to preserve and where necessary restore all the original interior design fabric of the building including features such as doors, door handles, banisters, balcony railings, curved vents, circular wall mounted lights, original lift floor indicators. These original features that have survived for the duration of the Arts Centre's existence are integral to the overall design and the listed building and any loss of this original fabric would be deeply regrettable and avoidable. Where internal modifications must be made to improve accessibility and systems to modern standards we now expect then original features should be preserved and reincorporated into the fabric of the building with the independent advice of an expert heritage consultant, preferably someone with a track record of advising clients on modernist listed buildings.

We note the proposal to remove some unsympathetic additions to the fabric but not others. Some fundamental design decisions that are, apparently, yet been made would also have an impact on the works being consulted on. There was nothing in the proposals, for example, about the internal bridge, restoring the original chandelier, or access up and down to Cinema 1 and its bar and toilets. Without the context it is hard to say whether the proposals in the foyer for lifts and toilets, say, are adequate or appropriate.

We support making the Curve completely accessible, removing the clutter, putting the bars back and installing appropriate furniture (hopefully restoring the original design). We also appreciate the need to restore the original toilets to full working order as a matter of urgency. The road and dropping off point at level -1, sadly seems to be downgraded to a "service road" rather than being restored as an alternative, covered, safe and accessible entrance for concert-goers. We regret this missed opportunity, especially as it would improve access for anyone with limited mobility arriving by car. We have spoken to taxi drivers, and they currently drop customers at Silk Street because they do not know about the lower entrance, leaving people in wheelchairs to struggle with the bollards when there is a much better alternative.

#### 2.6 Lakeside terrace

It would be a huge mistake, in our view, to treat the Lakeside doors as a main front entrance to the Arts Centre. This should remain on Silk Street. The Lakeside terrace is a very specific reference to the architectural heritage of country houses in which the garden or parterre at the back is in contrast to a more sedate front entrance and façade. The lake and terrace should remain as a delight to discover once you are in the building.

The terrace should be restored to the highest quality, with no additional permanent features and with and replacement furniture to be completely in step with the original design. The (unnumbered) spiral feature/stairs shown on the consultation drawings would be strongly resisted by the Forum. We also understand that other projects to waterproof parts of the Barbican's public realm have not been entirely successful and we recommend a review of previous works to make sure the same mistakes are not repeated.

Whilst shading and cooling is undoubtedly vital, we are not sure that a permanent new apparatus of awnings/sunshades embedded in the terrace is either necessary or advisable. A solution that can be used in sunny weather and put away or retracted should be considered instead.

New, accessible, Lakeside doors need to also provide the same level of protection from noise as the current doors. And we wish to see the detailed proposals for dropping the window ledge

in the café (no plans or drawings were shown) together with all the improvements to accessibility planned in the food & drink areas.

The Lakeside should be designed in mind that this is a space very proximate to existing dwellings such as the flats in Gilbert House. These residents should be considered as whilst the Lakeside is and should remain an iconic public open space as intended, it requires a very sensitive approach. There are issues with visitors entering the space assigned to employees and students at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and visitors attempting to enter Speed and Thomas More Gardens which are Barbican residents' private gardens. Improved signage and wayfinding could help avoid this. Intensification of its usage could exacerbate this without careful management. The space has suffered from some inappropriate and poorly considered temporary design features which do not align with the coherent themes of the space, such as the repeating circular motif which is found across the Barbican Estate and at the fountains.

External lighting should only be implemented within an Estate-wide strategy on lighting which respects the heritage and original design as well as complying with City-wide lighting strategies. It is no use improving the external lighting on the Arts Centre terrace if the lighting in the rest of the Barbican is a complete mess.

## 2.7 Conservatory

We are highly supportive of the proposal to make the Conservatory a public space, free to enter, accessible to all, and sustainable in the face of the changing climate and local Urban Heat Island effects. It should also be a place for quiet enjoyment of the plants and landscaping, with the associated health benefits for visitors, workers and residents alike. Enclosing the commercial spaces so that their use does not interfere with the public access could be an interesting solution, provided that the glazing sufficiently insulates the conservatory and neighbouring homes from the noise of weddings and meetings etc and it does not unduly interfere with the public usage.

We are supportive of the proposal to relocate the water feature, to adjust the façade and the general approach to planting.

The proposal (4) for “a new arrival and welcome area for visitors to meet, gather and dwell” is unclear as to whether this is a design intervention, or simply a more intensive usage of the current Highwalk between the Conservatory and the Sculpture Court. No rationale was offered for why the Arts Centre's many existing spaces are not sufficient as “arrival and welcome” areas and in the absence of such information we do not support this.

## 2.8 Construction impacts

We would like to see the construction methodology and logistics assumptions, particularly for the Conservatory, external works and any aspect likely to give rise to noise, dust or additional traffic. We support the Barbican Association's call for no Saturday working.

## 2.9 Operational noise and nuisance

We would like to understand the impact and see the modelling data for any aspect of the project that has the potential to increase operational noise and nuisance before supporting these elements of the project.

## 2.10 Beech Gardens

Finally, we note that Phase 2 of the Beech Gardens project, which is outside the scope of this consultation but was planned partly to enable works to the Conservatory, is now running late and is over budget. Our view is that its scope has been unnecessarily expanded and since funding and time are now tight our preference is for it to be reined in and expedited by removing the requirement for an additional artwork, and for wayfinding; concentrating on removing the “yellow shed”, waterproofing and sustainable planting.

### 3 The Barbican & Golden Lane Neighbourhood Forum

- 3.1 The Barbican & Golden Lane Neighbourhood Forum (“the Forum”) is designated to represent the planning and infrastructure aspirations of community organisations, businesses and residents in our area. This includes the whole of the Golden Lane Estate, the Barbican Estate and the neighbouring residential blocks and housing in the north-west of the City of London. The Barbican and Golden Lane Neighbourhood Forum’s own analysis using the ONS nomis system, is that 4,194 people or 49% of the City’s total population live within the Barbican and Golden Lane Neighbourhood Forum Area.
- 3.2 The Forum was designated<sup>2</sup> in 2023, as the first Neighbourhood Forum in the City. Our Neighbourhood Plan is in preparation and will be a statutory plan on adoption. We are a statutory consultee on planning applications and the City of London’s Statement of Community Involvement acknowledges our role. The National Planning Policy Framework (para 132) says that; *“Neighbourhood planning groups can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in development....”*.
- 3.3 The Forum is primarily established for the public benefit for the following purposes:
- (a) to produce a Neighbourhood Plan for the promotion and improvement of the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the Barbican and Golden Lane Neighbourhood Area, its residents and businesses;
  - (b) to ensure that any development in the Barbican and Golden Lane Neighbourhood Area is appropriate to the distinctive and historic character of the Barbican and Golden Lane Neighbourhood Area;
  - (c) to promote high standards of town planning and architecture in the Barbican and Golden Lane Neighbourhood Area; and
  - (d) to develop, maintain and implement a Neighbourhood Plan in general conformity with the relevant statutory development plans for the Barbican and Golden Lane Neighbourhood Area, and in support of the Plan objectives, to propose projects that can be funded using the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy

### 4 Significance of the Barbican Estate and its relationship to the Arts Centre, its history and heritage

- 4.1 The Arts Centre and the entire Barbican Estate is a Grade II Listed building. Legislation protects all listed heritage. The entire Barbican Estate is Britain’s largest listed building. It is also covered by a Conservation Area Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)<sup>3</sup> and Listed Building Management Guidelines which are an adopted SPD of the City of London<sup>4</sup>. These Guidelines were prepared by Avanti Architects Ltd and note that *“a defining and pre-eminent aspect of the Barbican’s special interest is that it is not merely a ‘housing estate’ but was envisioned and planned as a whole piece of city fabric. Thus in addition to the residential buildings are schools, library, cinema, arts centre, exhibition halls, theatre, concert hall, youth hostel, shops, restaurants, pubs and diverse external landscape amenities (walkways, bridges, terraces, lakes, planting, etc) – all combining to create an overall social and spatial urban composition. Accordingly equal understanding and care is required in the stewardship not just of the residential buildings but of all the other components of the estate as a whole”* (para 2.2.1, our emphasis). It goes on to say that the *“partly contained, partly interpenetrating, spatial character is a unique urban achievement of its period and suggests that it is unlikely to be possible to add to, or subtract from, what was clearly intended as a finite architectural*

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<sup>2</sup> under the Localism Act 2011

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/assets/Services-Environment/barbican-golden-lane-ca-spd.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/assets/Services-Environment/spd-barbican-estate-listed-building-management-guidelines-volume-II.pdf> and <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/assets/Services-Environment/spd-barbican-estate-listed-building-management-guidelines-volume-IV.pdf>

*composition without detriment to the ensemble as a whole. In other words the open areas around and between the buildings are to be understood as positive spatial reservoirs, or ‘void’, rather than as development opportunities, or ‘room’ that could be infilled”. (para 2.2.3)*

- 4.2 The Barbican and Golden Lane Conservation area SPD defines the policy that “*Development should preserve and enhance the distinctive character and appearance of the Barbican and Golden Lane conservation area – as set out in this SPD – and the significance of individual heritage assets within the boundary. Where appropriate, development should seek to better reveal the significance of the conservation area and other individual heritage assets*”

ENDS

## **APPENDIX**

### **CITY OF LONDON “HAVE YOUR SAY ON BARBICAN RENEWAL” CONSULTATION QUESTIONS 30 JANUARY - 17 FEBRUARY 2025**

#### **1. Our proposals for Barbican Renewal**

Our proposals are for Phase 1 of Barbican Renewal, 2025-2030, covering plans for the Foyers, Lakeside and Conservatory.

The Renewal proposals will upgrade and restore building systems and ageing materials, while unlocking underused areas of the site for public, civic and creative use. Our proposals celebrate the Centre’s architectural vision and heritage, with a programme of sensitive conservation and upgrade to bring the buildings back to their best, while also delivering a place that is truly inclusive, sustainable and resilient.

Based on our priorities for Renewal and the feedback from early consultation and engagement, we have developed these design principles to guide the project’s development:

- Repair and conserve
- Design for all
- Reactivate space
- Focus on sustainability

**Q1a To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposals for Barbican Renewal?**

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree

**Q1b Do you have any comments on our proposals for Barbican Renewal?**

**2. The Foyers**

Key improvements include enhanced lighting, improved wayfinding, and better facilities. The shop and catering will relocate and additional toilets will be installed. Lighting will be restored and the space will be lighter and key entrances will be highlighted.

The doors to Lakeside and Silk Street will be wider, automated sliding doors, improving access and connections. Energy-efficient upgrades to the facades will reduce heat loss, alongside increasing natural light within the Foyers.

**Q2a To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposals for the Foyers?**

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree

**Q2b Do you have any comments on our proposals for the Foyers?**

**3. Lakeside**

Our proposals will repair, replace and refurbish the paving, tiling and waterproofing. The fountains, furniture and lighting will be upgraded, and new planting will invigorate the Lakeside edge and balconies.

Our plans will install energy-efficient glazing and accessible doors in the facades and introduce shading for external seating and the café/restaurant interiors. At ground floor the café window sill will be lowered to make it accessible for all users, allowing everyone to enjoy the beautifully framed view across the lake.

**Q3a To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposals for Lakeside?**

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree

**Q3b Do you have any comments on our proposals for Lakeside?**

**4. Conservatory**

Key improvements include repairing and conserving the original fabric while replacing the glazing. The space will become more sustainable with less requirement for heating and cooling. Adjustments to the layout of planters and beds will ensure universal access for all visitors; a new stair and lift will provide access to the upper balconies. Glazing in the internal terrace as an event space will enable the public to have free daily access throughout the week to the main Conservatory space.

The principles of ecobrutalist planting design, which define the Conservatory's current planting, will remain central to its future planting strategy. Sensitive improvements and restoration to the Conservatory will ensure that the planting remains the star of the show.

**Q4a To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposals for the Conservatory?**

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree

**Q4b Do you have any comments on our proposals for the Conservatory?**