

Committee	Dated:
Community and Children's Services	02/11/2018
Subject: Barbican Library Community Space	Public
Report of: Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information
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Summary

Officers from the City of London Corporation's Community and Children's Services (Barbican and Community Libraries, and Barbican and Property Services) and Planning departments have worked with architects and acoustic engineers to scope the creation of an enclosed space within the library for library events and private hire by the local community. To create a space that provides sufficient soundproofing from the noise within the Barbican Centre, a design with two glazed screens forming a soundproof lobby is required. The cost of building has been estimated at £259,859, excluding general contingency, professional and other fees, direct employer costs and VAT.

Officers from the Planning Department were consulted on the design and advised that it is highly unlikely that approval for such a room would be granted. Specialists from Anderson Acoustics carried out further testing and confirmed that only the proposed soundproof lobby would provide sufficient soundproofing for users of the room. A number of public and private/commercial events take place on level one of the Barbican Centre and many generate substantial noise. Noise notifications are given to library staff for the month ahead only. If the design was modified (and planning permission granted) to remove the soundproof lobby, there would be no guarantee of a quiet space for those hiring the room. Therefore, the room could only be used for library events and activities. While this would be of benefit to the library, it would not justify the expense of the project.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. Barbican Library is situated on level two of the Barbican Centre. It is a major London public library with special collections in art, music, classic crime and books about London. The library contains separate Children's and Music libraries and produces two major exhibition programmes every year. It also hosts the collection of the Society of Technical Analysts. Customers include City of London residents, City workers, students, researchers, visitors to the Barbican Centre and more. In 2017–2018, 292,101 people visited the library.
2. When the library opened in 1982, it was seen as the epitome of a modern public library. However, since that time, public library use has radically changed, from simply providing books and other loan items and answering enquiries, to a much more diverse offering.
3. Several national reports including *Libraries Deliver: Ambition for Public Libraries in England 2016 to 2021*, a report commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, have recognised the specific role of libraries to provide a safe, neutral community space. It is expected that modern public libraries will assist in delivering wider social outcomes within that space, including social inclusion, health and wellbeing and social mobility. The provision of services within libraries – such as lifelong learning classes, reading groups, health and wellbeing events, careers support, computers for public use and supporting digital literacy – is well established. The full text of *Libraries Deliver* can be found at:
www.gov.uk/government/publications/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-to-2021/libraries-deliver-ambition-for-public-libraries-in-england-2016-to-2021
4. Barbican Library was designed to be open plan and, unlike modern public library buildings, it has no enclosed spaces for library events, private hire and meetings. The *Barbican Listed Building Management Guidelines* exist to preserve the integrity of the original architecture and this constantly presents library staff with a number of creative challenges: talks and health checks take place in the open library space; staff meetings and reading groups take place in the staffroom and the Head of Barbican and Community Libraries' office is the only suitable space for recruitment interviews.
5. Building on the success of the hireable rooms at Artizan Street Library and Community Centre, the Community and Children's Services Departmental Leadership Team agreed to scope the feasibility of building a room in the Barbican Library, similar to the Artizan Street multi-hall. This room would be available for hire and provide flexible space to house known needs, including meetings, events, activities and rehearsal space. Working with colleagues from Barbican and Property Services, a brief for the architects was produced. The design had to address sufficient soundproofing, primarily to cope with noise

ingress from Barbican Centre activities, especially amplified music from level one events such as graduation ceremonies. The design would also have to prevent noise egress from the room into the general library space.

6. Following a procurement exercise, Evolution Architects was appointed to produce a feasibility report. They addressed the soundproofing issue by subcontracting Anderson Acoustics personnel to carry out acoustic tests at times of loud activity with the Barbican Centre and provide appropriate advice.

Current Position

7. Evolution Architects produced a feasibility report and a cost plan for a room. The total cost of building a suitable room was estimated at £259,859, excluding general contingency, professional and other fees, direct employer costs (unless stated) and VAT.
8. The report was discussed with colleagues in the Planning Department who raised several planning concerns, including:
 - The loss of community space if the room was turned over completely to private hire
 - The proposed space requires justification, and a thorough assessment of all available spaces in the library should accompany a Planning submission
 - Concern that the two glazed screens forming the soundproof lobby would become an unsightly space to store chairs
 - A single-glazed door and screen would likely achieve consent (but would not provide soundproofing).
9. At a series of meetings with planning officers, all these concerns were addressed.

Taking each point in turn:

- **The loss of community space if the room was turned over completely to private hire.**
The discussion covered the following points: the success of the multi-use, Artizan Street model; the need for community space within the library; the need for library event space; the plan to allow customers to use the room for quiet study when not in use for an event. The planning officers appeared satisfied with this reasoning.
- **That the proposed space requires justification, and a thorough assessment of all available spaces in the library should accompany a Planning submission.**
Assessments of five other library spaces were carried out. The planning officer appeared satisfied that the proposed space was the best choice.
- **Concern that the two glazed screens forming the soundproof lobby would become an unsightly space to store chairs.**
The architect assessed and identified additional space for furniture storage outside the room. The planning officers appeared satisfied with this explanation.
- **A single-glazed door and screen would likely achieve consent.**

In discussions with the Planning Officer, it was suggested that a double-glazed or triple-glazed screen might receive consent. However, Anderson Acoustics checked noise levels during a graduation ceremony (with accompanying jazz band) and advised that only a soundproof lobby, as specified in the plans, would provide adequate soundproofing. The Planning Officer clearly advised that this design would not receive planning consent.

10. Having received the above advice, we considered whether it would be worthwhile to proceed with a planning application for a room with reduced soundproofing. We concluded that, in this case, such a room could not be booked out for private and community hire. Without a guarantee of no sound ingress from noisy centre events, noise notifications from the centre only made available for the following month, and the frequency of last-minute commercial bookings for Barbican Centre space, (including the Fountain Room), we would not be able to guarantee that there would be no loud noise on event days.
11. Unlike many local authorities, the City has continued to invest in community meeting space. The Artizan Street Library and Community Centre was built in 2012. Golden Lane Community Centre has recently undergone a £1.25 million refurbishment, and now offers a large hall, classroom and three other meeting spaces to residents of Golden Lane, the Barbican and surrounding area. The City is currently working with the 4C Hotel Group to build a new community centre within their new development in the Minories. This will replace the current 'Green Box' facility, which was installed on the Mansell Street Estate by the City in 2007.
12. In 2015, the City commissioned Dr Roger Green from Goldsmiths, University of London to carry out research on social isolation in the Square Mile. Dr Green observed the need for 'bumping spaces'. These are not so much formal spaces for organised activities, (such as community centres), but places where people can go to spend time in the presence of and interact with others. These include libraries, coffee shops and pubs. The public areas of the Barbican Centre already provide excellent 'bumping' space. At any time, people of all ages can be seen, meeting for coffee, reading, working or just watching the world go by. This is a particularly helpful example because, other than public libraries, there are few places where someone can simply sit and be, without having to spend money.

Proposals

13. The building of shared-use community space in Barbican Library should not be progressed any further.

Implications

15. The cost of building space for library use only, even with reduced soundproofing, would be prohibitive. With no income stream attached, there is no way of recouping these costs. There is also no guarantee that, even with reduced soundproofing, the plans would receive planning permission.

Conclusion

16. Barbican Library has no enclosed space for events and activities and, unlike modern public libraries, no rooms for public events and community hire. A feasibility report to build a suitable space has been produced but, in order to address noise from the Barbican Centre, a design incorporating a soundproof lobby is required. This is highly unlikely to achieve planning consent and, if we opted to use less-effective soundproofing, the room could not be offered for private hire. As providing space for private hire was a primary objective of this project, it is recommended that no further progress be pursued for this project.

Appendices

- None

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