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| <b>Committee</b>  | <b>Dated:</b>            |
| Community and Children's Services<br>Culture, Heritage and Libraries  | 07/06/2019<br>09/07/2019 |
| <b>Subject:</b><br>Barbican Library Community Space   | <b>Public</b>            |
| <b>Report of:</b><br>Andrew Carter, Director of Community and Children's Services   | <b>For Information</b>   |
| <b>Report author:</b><br>Carol Boswarthack, Head of Barbican and Community Libraries, Department of Community and Children's Services |                          |

### 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 to protect hirers 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 this design would be granted.

We have been advised that in terms of planning permission, a design with double or triple glazing rather than a soundproof lobby would be more acceptable. 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 staff for the month ahead only so prospective hirers would be made aware of this in advance. The estimated cost of building would be in the region of £177,000 which, if permissions were granted, would be sought from Community Infrastructure Levy funding.

### Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note this 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 2018–2019, 269,312 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](https://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-planned 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, adult education classes 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 adequate soundproofing).
  - A double or even triple glazed door and screen would provide better (although not complete) soundproofing and may achieve consent.
9. Having received the above advice, we are considering whether it would be worthwhile to proceed with a planning application for a room with reduced soundproofing. Such a room potentially could be booked out for private and community hire if it were made clear that we cannot guarantee there will be no noise ingress from the Centre. Noise notifications from the centre are only made available for the following month, and the frequency of last-minute commercial bookings for Barbican Centre space, (including the Fountain Room) means we would not be able to guarantee that there would be no loud noise on event days.
10. 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.

11. 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.

## **Implications**

12. The cost of building space with reduced soundproofing will be in the region of £177,000. Members need to consider within the context of the Fundamental Review if this is a priority area (in-line with the Corporate Plan) and if the investment represents value for money.

## **Conclusion**

13. 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 was considered. This is highly unlikely to achieve planning consent but a design incorporating reduced soundproofing may be successful.

Members are invited to consider if creating such a space is a clear strategic and funding priority.

## **Appendices**

- None

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