

The Public Realm in and around the Barbican Estate

Summary

Residents are concerned about the poor state of the public realm in and around the Barbican Estate. The City has delegated responsibility for maintaining the public realm to the Barbican Estate Office (BEO). The budget for this maintenance, including drain maintenance is around £300,000 pa, Given the extent of the challenge, it is surprising how well the BEO does with this limited budget.

Contrast this with the £35 million project to waterproof and replace all the podium areas around the Estate. Beech Gardens Phase 1 was the first stage of this work. It cost over £4 million, is of questionable utility and is already showing signs of dilapidation caused by inadequately funded maintenance, poor initial design and project implementation.

Residents don't want the City to spend more on maintaining the public realm around the Barbican. On the contrary, we want the City to spend less, but more effectively.

Resolution

- The RCC ask that the BRC acknowledge the reasonable concerns of residents and that
- The BRC ask those responsible for the funding and implementation of maintenance programmes for the public realm in and around the Barbican Estate to look for a new approach for upgrading and maintenance

The unrefurbished public realm

The dilapidated condition of the public areas of the Estate is a surprise to many visitors. This dilapidation is worrying, not just from an aesthetic viewpoint, but more importantly from the “stitch in time” consequences of poor maintenance. This dilapidation concerns residents but the impact on visitors is surely more significant. The City has launched its challenging initiative “Culture Mile”, which will attract international attention. However, visitors to and participants in Culture Mile encounter filth and dilapidation as they make their way across the podiums and along Beech Street. Currently 1.5 million people visit the Barbican Centre each year. This number will rise significantly when Culture Mile gets fully under way. To these numbers we need to add City workers and visitors to the City who use the Barbican as a thoroughfare, soon to substantially increase when Crossrail finally arrives.

To the casual observer, The City seems to be more interested in shiny new projects, whilst neglecting what it already has. The remaining £30 million to be spent on the highwalks is a clear example of this approach. This expenditure represents one hundred times the current annual maintenance budget. The replacement programme is extravagant, wasteful and unsustainable.

Financing Constraints

Members of the RCC are fully aware of the constraints that surround some of the sources of money used to maintain and renew the City's infrastructure. However, the City has demonstrated its ability to use creative financing and legal structure to overcome these constraints.

Examples

On the following pages are some examples from around the Barbican These are not isolated occurrences; it is difficult to walk more than a few metres without observing dilapidation.



Corroded fixings on steps up to Beech Highwalk from Lauderdale Place



Railings unpainted for at least 20 years and 20 mm thick calcination on Defoe Place



Door to the Estate from Beech street



Paving on the Sculpture Court



Flooding on the new Beech Gardens Highwalk



Plants in mortar joints on Cromwell Highwalk



Calcination on a bench on new Beech Gardens Highwalk



Grass growing out of a drain on Beech Gardens Highwalk