

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
<b>Barbican Centre Board</b>	27 September 2023
<b>Subject: Barbican Centre – Cinema Annual Strategic Update</b>	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	<b>3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10</b>
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>Y/N</b>
<b>If so, how much?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>Report of: Claire Spencer, CEO Barbican Centre</b>	<b>For Discussion</b>
<b>Report author: Gali Gold, Head of Cinema, Barbican Centre</b>	

### **Summary**

This paper outlines Cinema programming activities at the Barbican Centre since April 22 and considers opportunities and challenges faced by the department.

Barbican Cinema is at the forefront of cinema appreciation, joy and transformative experience through our commitment to film viewing as a collective, in person experience. The global pandemic hit the core of our modus operando, as it did across the cultural sector.

The last two years have been our journey of recovery as we returned to our venues, reviving that unique immersive film experience. All that while, learning and adjusting to changes within the film industry and audience behaviour, alongside organisational changes, from the ramifications of Barbican Stories, through to changes in leadership, organisational culture and priorities and, flexible working patterns.

### **Recommendation**

The Board NOTE the report.

## Main Report

### Barbican Cinema overview

**We are London's creative catalyst for arts, curiosity and enterprise. We spark creative possibilities and transformation for artists, audiences and communities – to inspire, connect and provoke debate. We are the place to be in this Destination City, where everyone is welcome. Our impact is felt far outside our walls and ripples before the experiences we offer – locally, nationally and internationally.**

Barbican Cinema is at the forefront of cinema appreciation, joy and transformative experience through our commitment to film viewing as a collective, in person experience. The global pandemic hit the core of our modus operandi, as it did across the cultural sector. The last two years have been our journey of recovery as we returned to our venues, reviving that unique immersive film experience. All that while, learning and adjusting to changes within the film industry and audience behaviour, alongside organisational changes, from the ramifications of Barbican Stories, through to changes in leadership, organisational culture and priorities and, flexible working patterns.

We have seen gradual but consistent increase of audiences retuning to our venues to watch New Release titles; an encouraging strong engagement with our exclusive arts programme and bespoke screening events; record numbers for our family film offer and notable success of our unique training programmes for Emerging Film Curators.

We focused our work in creating a consistent and truly comprehensive access offer which addresses barriers to cinema film viewing from disabilities, to neurodiversity, through to financial barriers (Pay What You Can). We are working towards a truly inclusive approach through our diverse, international film programme, partnership work, team make up and marketing strategies, holding our commitment to the popular and artistic merits of cinema the world over.

### Barbican Cinema

#### About the cinema

Barbican Cinema holds a unique position within the UK film exhibition sector, integrating a curated New Release and Event Cinema slate alongside a unique Art House curated programme of thematic seasons, specialised film festivals, regular subject/region or mode specific series; a dedicated programme for families and young audiences, as well as flagship training schemes for the next generation of cinema curators.

We focus on contemporary international cinema and elevate marginalised cinema from past decades through our Cinema Restored series, Hidden Figures programmes and thematic in-house curated seasons.

We're tuned to the most topical issues of our day and connect audiences with those through the artistic expressions of engaged filmmakers the world over, who delve into those issues in the stories they tell via films, cinematic provocations, and immersive experiences occurring in the unique setting of collective film viewing.

Our programme takes place across the 3 Barbican Cinema venues with a 4<sup>th</sup> Outdoor Cinema, set up at the Barbican Sculpture court at the end of each summer.

Barbican Cinema works in collaboration with the other Barbican Art forms, when our curatorial team responds to programmes taking place in the Barbican Gallery and the Curve; through engagement with the musical talent brought to the fore by our colleagues in Barbican Music, with highlights in the Theatre programme and through the involvement of the other art forms in the outdoor cinema programme.

We work closely with Creative Collaborations on our provision for young audiences, including schools and in our engagement with communities for our Senior Community screenings and disabled filmmakers screening events.

## Barbican Cinema 22/23 Programme Highlights

### Journeys Across Afro-Futurism

This programme in June 2022 was looking at the origins of Afro-Futurism and the traditions of this aesthetic - imagining a future cinema abundant with arts, science and technology, as seen through a Black lens – and how it impacts cinema today. The 6-part series gained momentum alongside Hayward Gallery's *In the Black Fantastic* which opened in late June. Tipping into the zeitgeist captured some prominent press attention with coverage in the New Scientist, BBC World Service, Sight & Sound and Time Out.

### Silent Film and Live Music: GSMD Japanese early animation

In June 2022 we hosted a sold-out event in our largest cinema with regular partners, Guildhall School's Electronic and Produced Music Studio. We curated a selection of early Japanese animated shorts from the 1920s and 1930s, loaned from the National Film Archive of Japan.

This innovative pairing of silent anime and modern electro-acoustic music worked beautifully well and was complemented by live Benshi narration by Tomoko Komura. It was a popular addition to our ongoing Silent Film & Live Music strand, reimagining how silent film can be presented in cinemas today.

### Refugee Week 2022 and 2023

For the last 2 years, Barbican Cinema has held events for Refugee Week in collaboration with the UK for UNHCR. Launching in 2022 with a single screening of the film *Simple as Water* followed by a Q&A involving the filmmaker, UNHCR representatives and ambassadors, the project expanded in 2023, to include two screening events, alongside a three-week run of a photography exhibition by and about refugees, in the Barbican Foyer.

### New Strands

Two new strands were launched in 2022, ***Cinema Restored*** and ***Experiments in Film***, seeking to create spaces for works previously less visible across the Barbican cinema programme. In different ways they have been able to celebrate and give visibility to figures on the margins of cinema.

In ***Cinema Restored*** we draw from the excellent work being done by cinema archives and restoration laboratories to share with London audiences those which have fallen outside western cinematic canons. Highlights included ***Boat People*** Among the most important films to come out of the Hong Kong New Wave, Ann Hui's drama focuses on the aftermath of the Vietnam War, a period in which many Vietnamese would flee from the country by sea; and, ***Losing Ground*** by the late Kathleen Collins, a rare example of a Black independent film depicting the ennui of a Black middle class, focusing on a community of professional well-educated artists.

***Experiments in Film*** pushes at conventional understandings of what film is and what it could be. This strand gives a platform for exciting filmmakers/artists, both classical and emerging.

Highlights include: *Taking the Horse to Eat Jalebis* (Ghode Ko Jalebi Khilane Le Ja Riya Hoon) an elusive, uncategorizable film by veteran theatre director, Anamika Haksar, which brings multiple modes of register to create a portrait of Old Delhi. and *Where Were You in 1992* (see details in cross-departmental collaborations section), a programme bringing together works that challenge institutional violence and racism, exploring the legacy of resistance marking 30 years since the murder of Stephen Lawrence.

### Post Horror

Every Thursday night in August 2022, our Post-Horror Summer Nights season dedicated to Art House independent films subverting common generic tropes, attracted strong numbers

and gained critical attention. Author Steve Rose, who coined the term in a Guardian article back in 2017, gave an extended introduction to the opening night and also revisited the concept in a new article referencing and thus promoting the programme just before it opened. The series featured bespoke recorded introductions from director Robert Eggers (The Witch) and David Church (author of Post-Horror; Art, Genre and Cultural Elevation), plus extended in-person introductions by Cinema Curator Sonia Zadurian.

In May 23, **Snapshots: Caribbean Cinema Up Close** explored Contemporary Caribbean Cinema and self-representation.

It was curated by Patrice Robinson, the team's Cinema Administration Assistant. An emerging film curator in her own right who proposed the season following a (non-Barbican related) trip to Trinidad & Tobago film festival in 2022.

Taken on as a development opportunity, the season had 3 sellout events out of 4, welcomed in new and varied audiences to the Barbican and attracted exceptional press interest with coverage on The British Blacklist, The Voice, the popular Shade podcast, and an extensive feature in the Guardian on Kavery Kaul's film *One Hand Don't Clap*.

*"I wanted to drop a quick note just to see we were incredibly delighted and impressed with the event and proud to see Caribbean cinema on at such an esteemed institution. The selection of films ranged from funny to moving and everything in between. Well done to the curator and we would certainly love to see and support more events like this in the future."* – Cinema Booker

The curation of Snapshots: Caribbean Cinema Up Close provided a rare opportunity for a team member without a curatorial role to add to the main programme.

Whilst proving to be a major success, the season has prompted the Cinema team to have further discussions about new and innovative approaches to staff development in lieu of clear internal paths of progression.

### **Queer 90s**

In June 2023 we presented Queer 90s, exploring LGBTQ+ representation in 1990s cinema from around the world. While most discussions on queer films in this decade of great change focus on movies associated with the New Queer Cinema movement, with a bias towards English language North American stories, Queers 90s featured films from Austria, China, Cuba, Germany, Guinea, India, Japan and Spain. Filmmakers Hiroyuki Oki, Ursula Puerrer and Monika Treut joined us for Q&As, while experts such as Tara Brown, Bidisha Mamata and Tony Rayns were invited to introduce the films.

The programme featured 8 films, including the UK premieres of two newly restored features. Queer 90s received great press attention, with a long feature in the Guardian by Ryan Gilbey and articles in Little White Lies, Pink News and i-D. Half of the events sold out, and all enjoyed diverse and very engaged audiences. The average capacity across all Queer 90s screenings was 83.6%.

### **Eat the Screen July-August 2023**

An in-house curated season of short- and long-form films, many with live introductions and Q&As engaged with some of today's most urgent topics relating to food such as: the cost-of-living crisis, climate change and biodiversity. The season tipped into a number of the department's programming priorities – on gender parity (21 of the 41 films in the season were directed by women) and accessibility (bespoke HOH captions were produced for one programme; one screening was offered on a Pay What You Can basis) – and existing programming strands, notably Senior Community Screenings, and Family Film Club. The season attracted significant media attention with interviews on BBC London Radio, Times Radio and previews in both the Evening Standard and The Guardian. Audiences were very engaged with half the events selling out, including a key event in Cinema 1, with 75% attendance overall.

## Outdoor Cinema

Barbican Outdoor Cinema returned in 2021 after a 4-year hiatus and has continued to go from strength to strength in the years following. 2022 saw the run of 6 films go out to an increased audience of 550 people each night. The wonderfully eclectic programme was complimented for the first time by an exciting food offer of street food vendors, adding to the festival vibe. In 2023 the programme was expanded further to include 11 films and audiences of 650. The recent edition drew its first sponsorship with Campari. Both years have been very successful, with many of the events selling out and others drawing large audiences.

The programme received an extensive press coverage in the run up and during the events including three previews in the Standard, Time Out, Radio Times and Metro.

*“If you prefer your outdoor cinema a bit more vintage, the Barbican’s striking Sculpture Court is where to head this summer. On the bill are a feast of five-star treats, from Tarkovsky’s headtrip cine-memoir *Mirror* to Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*, and Studio Ghibli’s lesser-seen gem *Nausicaä and the Valley of the Wind* to LGBTQ+ classic *Paris is Burning*. Look out, too, for a dose of cinematic serotonin in the shape of *Monsoon Wedding* and *Singin’ in the Rain* – perfect starlit crowd pleasers, both.” – Time Out*

*“whether you’re watching it for the first or the 100th time, the opportunity to laugh, cry and sashay along at Barbican’s open-air cinema is too good to miss”. – I Newspaper*

Charles Gant (who gathers and assesses indie cinema box office) reported on Barbican Outdoor Cinema, noting that it showed the road to success with such screenings, gaining numbers strong enough to add the films to his chart: *“Not many venues are blessed with an outdoor space to match Barbican’s Sculpture Court, but the success certainly provides an inspiration to cinemas able to explore similar ideas for late summer.”*

## ScreenTalks Highlights

Our New Release ScreenTalk programme continues to bring a wide variety of filmmaking talent into our Barbican cinemas. We’ve had sold out screentalks for BAFTA winning dramas *All Quiet on the Western Front* + director Edward Berger and stars Daniela Brühl and Albrecht Schuh, *Aftersun* with director Charlotte Wells, as well as Academy Award nominated *Close* with director Lukas Dhont and *All the Beauty and the Bloodshed* with director Laura Poitras.

A creative approach was developed by our cinema curator Sonia Zadurian instigating non talent based thematic ScreenTalks provoked by New Release titles. Such exciting event took place alongside *Spider-Man through the Spider-verse* release. Amon Warmann (Contributing Editor, Empire Magazine, in-person), Paul Taberham (Associate Professor, Arts University Bournemouth, via Zoom) and Tiffany Lam (Visual Development Artist on the film, via Zoom) discussed the significance of both the Spider-Verse cinematic offerings after a screening of this latest production. As part of Oscar Week, we held a special presentation by Delphine Lievens on diversity, inclusion and the Academy Awards.

## Family Film Club and Family Film Week

These young audience targeted programmes had their most successful iterations this past year and look set to only increase in popularity going forward. Weekly Saturday morning screenings and our annual October Family Film Week have had numerous sell-outs and ongoing teamwork with the Creative Collaboration department has seen workshops buzzing with families getting creative before the film on the last Saturday of every month and over half term. Highlights have included rarely seen international gems such as *The Bear’s Famous Invasion of Sicily* (a timely anti-war allegory, screened in the early stages of Ukraine

conflict), bespoke curated shorts programmes unavailable anywhere else in the UK, the latest from Hollywood including the recent smash hit *Matilda: The Musical*, as well as archive events with silent slapstick legend Buster Keaton accompanied by live keyboard. The range and drive of our Family programme was also one of the main influencers behind Film London focussing their Film London exhibitor Forum around how to reach family audiences and choosing our venue to host the event.

## **Cross departmental collaborations**

### **Visual Arts**

#### **Carolee Schneemann: Body Politics**

Running from September to November 2022, the Carolee Schneemann Film Series was an in-house curated five-part season complementing the Gallery exhibition *Carolee Schneemann: Body Politics*. It offered audiences the opportunity to watch all of Schneemann's films in a cinema setting, plus a selection of film work by Schneemann's contemporaries in the 1960s and 70s, women directors making taboo-busting body-centred films; two documentary profiles of the artist; and a programme of work by contemporary film and media artists responding to themes in Schneemann's work (including politics of gender and rituals of embodiment). The latter included a drag performer, performing live with her on-screen avatar – a first for our cinema!

In 2023 cinema curated film programmes along the exhibition of *Alice Neal: Hot Off The Griddle* and *Carrie Mae Weems: Reflections for Now*, forming part of the exhibitions public programme.

### **Music**

#### **Silent Film & Live Music: Clare Hammond – Ghosts and Whispers**

In October 2022 Cinema and Music collaborated to host a silent film and live music screening featuring images and film created by The Quay Brothers with live music from pianist Clare Hammond. The screening sold out in Cinema 1 and both departments have been in discussions over how to build on this success in the future.

### **Theatre**

RSC's *My Neighbour Totoro* production in the Theatre last Autumn and in the coming one allowed us a fantastic opportunity to explore several Studio Ghibli titles on screen. We screened Ghibli titles *Ponyo* and *Princess Mononoke* – the latter on our giant outdoor screen to a sell-out crowd (in August 22) joined by *Nausicaa's* sell out Outdoor screening in August 23. The original film version of *My Neighbour Totoro* was followed by a discussion in partnership with the RSC team, welcoming the director of the theatre show Phelim McDermott to the Cinema 1 stage for an incredibly insightful, and often emotional discussion.

## **Creative Collaborations**

Our work with our Creative Collaboration team is at its most entwined when delivering the Chronic Youth programme. Beginning in September with the recruitment of a group of Young Programmers, who then meet regularly until they deliver their festival weekend in April, the project has become well known as an exciting opportunity for young people taking their first steps into a film career and is used as a case study in Film London's resources for working with Young Audiences. This past year saw the Young Programmers deliver an incredibly rich selection of films that spoke to their self-titled theme, 'A Time and A Place' including a sell-out London Premiere screening of *How to Save A Dead Friend* a groundbreaking and

challenging documentary pieced together from twelve years of footage, followed by a live Q&A with the director Marusya Syroechkovskaya, as well as a preview screening of the re-released 1986 film *The Passion of Remembrance* from directors Isaac Julien and Maureen Blackwood, followed by a live Q&A + BSL, with the producer Martina Attille and original cast member Antonia Thomas.

Our work with schools included both our collaboration with the Into Film Festival and our own in-house curated screenings. We have aimed to deliver at minimum of 2 schools' screenings per term and include live speakers for many events. A highlight this year was a showing of the Japanese anime title, *Belle*, for secondary schools and colleges followed by a Q&A session with a designer on the film, Eric Wong, who gave great insight into the creative process and practical advice on non-traditional career pathways. In addition to our work with Into Film, we hosted our in house curated annual shorts programme for primary schools for international Women's Day, featuring films directed and written by women filmmakers. This programme has become so popular in only its second year that a repeat screening was needed to keep up with demand.

### **Public Programme**

Cinema has developed its collaboration with the Public Programme team, instigating and producing joint high profile programmes. One exciting example is *Where Were you in 1992?* Which included a foyer installation and a ScreenTalk cinema event bringing together works by Amanda Egbe, Rastko Novaković and Paul Halliday that challenge institutional violence and racism and explores legacies of resistance.

This collaboration continues in our future programme.

### **Programme Partners**

Our arts programme includes established and new Collaborations with creative partners: film festivals, independent curators and third sector organisations which seek audience engagement through film.

Barbican Cinema plays a vital role in the ecosystem of London's film exhibition and as such we dedicate much time and thought in instigating and cultivating these partnerships. In the period reported these included: The London Indian Film Festival; The Arab British Centre for Safar The Arab Film Festival: New East Cinema; The London Mathematical Laboratory for Science on Screen; Palestine Film Festival; The Architecture Foundation for Architecture on Film; UNHCR for Refugee Week; LUX; Human Rights Watch Film Festival; Doc'n Roll; London Animation Film Festival; Film London for The Jarman Award; ERG Jazz Festival; Reclaim the Frame; Fringe Queer Film and Art Festival; Queer East; Oska Bright; Age UK. We are guided by our curatorial priorities and voice making sure that these partnerships are rooted in our commitment to EDI, through the diverse programme they offer, the variety of voices and points of view expressed and the teams which programme and produce the selected film programmes.

### **Changes in our Marketing approach**

From September 2022 we changed our approach to digital advertising and moved to a longer runs of advertising, with larger budgets given to the media buyers to run digital ads for longer periods of time. This had contributed to a large increase in ticket sales for Family Film Club in particular, which has sold out most events since November 2023 until it paused for summer break in 2023.

Since late 2022, our marketing team has worked alongside cinema curators to produce in-house promotional videos which have been used on the Barbican's cinema screens before new release films, website, and social media platforms.

Featuring footage from the films alongside commentary from many of the cinema's curators, and the Head of Department, these in-house trailers have taken advantage of the Barbican Cinema's captive audience and have helped to bring the work of the curators into the public eye.

Campaigns that have featured this new style of in-house content include Oscar Week, Queer 90s, Snapshots: Caribbean Cinema up Close, Eat the Screen, Hidden Figures: and the upcoming programmes Hidden Figures: Binka Zhelyazkova and Amazing Grace restoration's screening.

Dedicated in-house content has also been created for the Barbican's social media channels. Once per month, a 'Barbican Film Picks' post is published on Instagram and TikTok, highlighting a favourite film of a curator.

In the past year we have moved to fully harnessing the work of the Barbican's design team to produce animated graphics, for both the in-cinema assets and, for the first time, for our digital ads which lead to improved conversion rates.

### **Equity, diversity and inclusion**

#### **Programme and partnerships**

Demonstrated through the highlights noted above, our cinema programme champions the rich diversity of cinema cultures from around the world and exercises targeted programming to highlight film talent, stories and cinema modes that have been marginalised. In addition to focused programmes such as Queer 90s, Snapshots and Afro Futurism, each of our in-house curated programmes is an outcome of curatorial process attentive to the historical inequalities of our cinema culture and with an aim to give stage to cinema work by and about women, LGBTQ and the Global South.

Our partnership work echoes the same principles as can be demonstrated in the variety of selected creative partners we collaborate with.

#### **Accessible Cinema**

Barbican Cinema continues to develop the breadth and depth of its accessible programme. We have recently increased the number of captioned screenings in our new release programme by 100% to 4 per week, and we continue to include captioned events within our curated and family programme.

Relaxed Screenings in Barbican Cinema continue to go from strength to strength. With the 2 monthly New Release screenings continuing to attract audiences and receive great feedback. In recent months Cinema have heard from individuals and groups who praise the format and its ability to allow them to access spaces they had previously felt locked out from. We have built on this legacy by continuing our partnership with Oska Bright, the world's leading learning-disabled film festival, hosting 2 screenings each year. In addition to this, November 2022 saw Barbican Cinema work in collaboration with local young filmmaking group In Focus from Mouth That Roars. The group hosted a screening of their work with quizzes, panel discussions and in-depth conversations around visibility in the arts. Finally, in August 2023 we hosted a screening with Headway East London as part of their programme extending from their exhibition in the Curve Gallery. This screening was well attended, and the engagement of the audience was passionate and warm.

*"I went to the relaxed screening of Barbie and had an amazing time, it was the first time I got to see a film in cinema in years without getting a meltdown and I'm so grateful you're putting in the work to provide these screenings for people with differing sensory needs like myself."*  
– Barbican Cinema Booker

In May 2022, Barbican Cinema started a new strand of Senior Community Screenings. welcoming 60+ cinema goers to watch the latest new releases every second Monday morning for a reduced ticket price and with a tailored community ambiance. Though the screenings are targeting the over 60s and retirees, they are not exclusive, and we welcome bookers to bring family or friends under 60 to the events. One of the primary goals of this



strand is to combat loneliness, and every year there are 3 to 4 free events, curated and produced with a wraparound offer in the foyers, to facilitate time to Socialise and converse.

*“My friend and I attended the senior cinema today and just wanted to let you know that we thoroughly enjoyed the film which was entertaining and thought provoking plus the refreshments and dominoes rounded off a very pleasant event where we met lots of interesting people.” – Cinema booker*

Also in May 2022, Barbican Cinema started a trial run of its Pay What You Can screenings. 1 screening every Friday evening is selected from the new release programme and given the PWYC pricing structure, starting from £3 and going up to £15 (higher than our standard price in order to keep the screenings sustainable). The messaging is based on our own donation messaging, encouraging bookers to select the price that works for them. The screenings have been successful both in increasing attendance and economically, proving to be a sustainable addition to the cinema programme.

Our offer for young audiences is designed to spark a love of the big screen experience and the Barbican from the youngest age possible. Each programme is designed to welcome young people, giving them time and space to develop and explore cinema and the Arts, feel comfortable and relaxed in our venues and access affordable titles and curated events unavailable anywhere else. The Young Barbican offer is available across all cinema programmes and has a very high take up.

### **Emerging Film Curators Lab**

The crucial role of cinema curators in shaping cinema programmes and their audience led us to expand our EDI work to our young Creative programmes, in particular our Emerging Film Curators Lab where the ambition in developing new talent is rooted in our approach to EDI. The lab has taken place for the third time in summer 2023, following the impressive success of the last editions as well as the sold-out screenings of the selected projects in winter 2023. This initiative aims to develop and diversify this critical aspect of film exhibition, namely cinema curators, who impact our film culture through the films and events they develop for cinema audiences.

We have identified this aspect of the ecosystem in which we operate as a critical one to have input onto, drawing on our commitment to cinema appreciation; the importance of championing international cinema and the vital role of cinema curators in influencing what ends up on our screens and in turn, the engagement of diverse audiences with cinema screenings.

The cinema team at large, including cinema marketing and comms were all involved in the training, as well as a selection of external film professionals who contribute through their knowledge and varied curatorial experiences/settings to the cohort's skillset.

Our callout attracted just under 200 applicants from which we selected 10 projects of individuals and collectives. The breadth of backgrounds and experiences of the cohort proved the importance of this training opportunity, while the projects proposed demonstrated authenticity of perspectives and creativity, we feel privileged to support.

In August 23 four projects were selected to be developed into cinema events which will take place at the Barbican between January and March 2024.

### **Employee Resource Groups**

Barbican Cinema team is highly engaged with the ERGs and members of the team play key roles in the 4 currently working within the Barbican to foster a diverse, inclusive workplace.

### **Industry Review**

Overall, the health of the cinema industry has slowly improved but not yet to pre-pandemic levels, sitting closer to 70%-80% of pre pandemic performance. Just before cinemas' closure, back in March 2020, Barbican Cinema achieved its best ever year of attendance and income, finishing with the most successful new release in our history, *Parasite*.

Returning to that level of attendance may never be possible as many new challenges, from streamers to the cost-of-living crisis impact audience behaviour. However, in recent months, cinema has seen a return to numbers similar to pre-pandemic with the release of *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer*, which helped us achieve over 200% of our target for July 23'. It will be interesting to see if future titles such as *Killers of the Flower Moon* and *Dune Part II* received a boost of attendance now so many more have returned to Cinemas, as audience tracking noted that *Barbie* was the first time back to the cinema for a large part of the audience. The major distributors with streaming services have gently started to change their approach, with exhibition windows increasing and the wisdom of moving straight or quickly on to streaming platforms being questioned. It is an era of much change for cinema, but the last 12 months have indicated that physical venues will continue to be a key part of this landscape.

The Barbican is routinely the number one UK venue for art house films. Between September 2022 and March 2023, Barbican has been the number one venue across opening weekend for 9 films, including *Blonde* (Netflix), *Emily* (Warner Bros), *Aftersun* (Mubi) and *Alcarras* (Mubi). However, most significantly, we were the number one UK venue for *The Eight Mountains* and *The Beasts* (in weekend 2 of release) titles released by Picturehouse and Curzon respectively, who have their own chain of cinemas, thus increasing their reach.

### **Team updates**

We have implemented some changes to our administration roles to better reflect the level and scope of the work carried out. The Cinema Administrator role was changed through job evaluation process to Senior Manager for Cinema while the Cinema Assistant Role changed title to Cinema Administrator Assistant.

New people have joined our Cinema Marketing Team bringing and implementing fresh and innovative approach to our event marketing and campaigns while our Comms team has benefitted from the recent changes in the Comms department, enabling clearer management lines and support.

### **Workload Review**

The recent changes across the Barbican, its newly implemented clear purpose and goals as well as the strategic plan, EDI and Audience strategies, changes in leadership and the more recent events around the Resolve Collective - have all demanded renewed attention to the way we work. The importance of the 'how' (how we work, how we deliver) alongside our continuous commitment to the 'what' (our programme).

In response, Barbican cinema team has gone through a period of introspection in relation to our workload, our processes and procedures and our priorities and focus. All this in order to make sure we can deliver a successful, diverse and exciting cinema programme within our resources and while making sure we maintain our wellbeing.

Individuals were asked to interrogate their projects in light of their working patterns (3 out of 7 team members are working part-time); suggest changes and future planning. These were discussed with the Head of Department before putting forward to the team in dedicated meetings where we all discussed and agreed the next steps.

The result is a better understanding across the team of roles and the impact of programmes on the wider team with an emphasis on long term planning and thoughtful spread across the calendar year. We have made changes to our work with several partners; to the structure of our offer to young audiences; the frequency of strands and scheduling of major in-house curated programmes. This process will enable us to make more informed decisions about what we focus on and what we leave aside. This will inform our programme from the start of 2024.

## **Barbican Renewal**

We take an active part in the input for the Exhibition spaces given our successful cinema 2/3 venues and the potential development of that activity into the redesigned exhibition halls.

The success of Outdoor Cinema demonstrates the potential use of 'hidden' spaces and thus invites further thinking in the development and incorporation of these spaces into the Barbican's core venues and civic purpose as part of Barbican Renewal.

## **Cinema Café/Bar Changes**

Both the bar in Cinema 1 and the Café/Bar in Cinema 2/3 have been brought in-house by Barbican Bars. This has immediately improved the offer and the look and feel of both spaces, whilst warming the welcome considerably. Though both are still works in progress, the communication and collaboration of the bars team with cinema has already had a direct positive effect on the audience experience of our venues.

## **Sustainability and Climate Change**

Cinema, along with the rest of the Barbican Centre, continues to drive down the use of print marketing and materials. We also continue to opt for digital formats and transmission of films in order to reduce delivery vehicles where appropriate. This is also true when considering live events, opting to use a live-stream to avoid unnecessary travel.

## **Challenges and Opportunities**

### **Challenges**

**Post Covid recovery period:** reduction in audience numbers and changes in behaviour have been addressed through adjustments of targets and further thinking about the important role of presenting a unique programme of events; keeping our standard tickets price below our art house competitors and putting extra effort into audience experience, from front of house through improvements to our cinema café & bar to the personal welcome and presence of cinema curators in a large number of our bespoke programmes.

**Streamers and online competition** We have prioritised the in-venue programme and experience and have put Barbican Cinema on Demand platform on hiatus until a clear digital strategy is implemented.

**Cost of Living Crisis** The reduction in audience attendance is often related to the cost of living crisis. We are keen to keep cinema as an affordable experience to all and thus keep our ticket prices at the lower end of art house cinemas in central London while trialling Pay What You Can screenings.

**Brexit and Rising Costs** continue to affect our operations, from the increase in cost of print transport, including border difficulties, to the cost of hiring vital equipment for the Outdoor Cinema. The rising costs continue to put pressure on our budget and what we are able to deliver.

**Capacity/Workload** The ambitious programme targets alongside the organisational changes have presented challenges to people's workload. We have addressed these through our workload review and changes implemented to our programme as well as exercising flexible working patterns in a tailored manner, responding to individual needs.

### **Changes in Creative Collaborations**

The current changes in Creative Collaborations and their effect on our collaborative work are yet to be determined with some risk around our family offer and young creatives schemes. We are working closely to adjust the current offer in the interim period.

**Technical Challenges** Due to ongoing lack of investment in the sound and projection equipment, Barbican Cinemas lag behind our competitors. This has a significant reputational damage in a very technical artform, and potential loss of income with audience and distributors potentially opting elsewhere. Recently we were approached to be part of an exclusive run of a high-profile title which was taken away as we did not have the technical specifications required. The negative impact is likely to occur more often were we not to invest in our technical equipment infrastructure.

### **International Travel Budget**

Cinema research and travel budget is extremely limited. Consequently, the team has little presence at international festivals, resulting in potential loss of profile, future collaborations and programming opportunities. We have been given a 'one off' small increase this year to enable us to do the bare minimum. An increase in this budget would have a positive effect on our programme and the international reputation of Barbican Cinema.

### **Opportunities**

#### **Team**

Flexibility in working patterns enables better adjustments to individual needs and maximise wellbeing within the team. Cinema developed a good system which allows for the team to be together for key meetings while making the best use of working remotely for part of the week.

#### **Audience**

The demonstrated renewed desire to get together and enjoy the collective experience of cinema creates new urgency around our bespoke programmes.

The centres focus on **audience strategy** and clarity around priorities enable better strategic work and is in line with cinema's approach to audiences at the heart of our work. We look forward to being informed by comprehensive audience data.

Our developed **access programme**, partnerships with Oskia Bright and research into best practice, together with our positive trail of Pay What you Can enable us to further develop our ambition to becoming a truly accessible cinema across our programme, facilities and modes of engagement with audiences.

#### **Income through Screen Advertising**

In April 2023 Barbican Cinema changed the pre-show advertising provider for the first time in its history, moving from Pearl & Dean to DCM. This change was made given the opportunity to further sponsorship income and increased advertising income. Additionally, changing over to DCM has helped our scheduling, as we now have the option to cut our pre-show programme down to just 12mins max of ads. With the release of films around the 3-hour mark showing no signs of slowing down, the flexibility of this 10min reduction option has been hugely helpful.

#### **Outreach Work Project**

With the help of Film London funding, Barbican Cinema was able to conduct some research and development, resulting in targeted outreach for our Relaxed Screenings programme.

#### **Corporate and Strategic implications**

The future plans of the Cinema team support the delivery of the City's Corporate Plan by:

*Contributing to a Flourishing Society*

Our programme connects people and stimulates discussion through engagement in the captivating experience of cinema viewing. Barbican Cinema's accessible cinema programme fosters inclusivity and breaks down barriers across a number of demographics. We look to engage new audiences and foster new film curation talent as well as giving a platform to independent films and filmmakers.

#### **Relevant Corporate Plan Outcomes**

- People are safe and feel safe
- People enjoy good health and wellbeing through engagement in the joyful collective experience of film viewing
- People have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and reach their full potential
- Communities are cohesive and have the facilities they need

#### *Support a Thriving Economy*

We look to bring the best work from around the world of cinema on to screens in London, supporting a diverse and engaging range of films. We bring renowned talent and fresh new voices to our cinemas, with our curation ranging from the biggest new releases to international art house cinema. We support our talented team to curate the best programme possible and provide a trusted source of entertainment and provocation for audiences, ensuring they have access to our whole programme. Our operations are financially sustainable while we aim to generate income for the centre.

#### **Relevant Corporate Plan Outcomes**

- Businesses are trusted and socially and environmentally responsible
- We have access to skills and talent we need

#### *Shaping Outstanding Environments*

Our art form allows us to respond to current issues and trends and we plan to stay nimble and flexible in a challenging industry. We work with other departments across the centre on exciting programmes and draw on each other's skills and experience.

#### **Relevant Corporate Plan Outcomes**

- We are digitally and physically well connected and responsive
- We inspire enterprise, excellence, creativity and collaboration

#### **Financial implications**

None

#### **Resource implications**

Refer to Challenges

#### **Legal implications**

None

#### **Risk implications**

None

#### **Equalities implications**

Refer to Equity, diversity and inclusion

#### **Climate implications**

Refer to Sustainability and climate change

## **Security implications**

None

### **Conclusion: a note from Gali Gold, Head of Cinema**

Barbican Cinema is going through a period of post pandemic recovery, adjusting to the changes in the cinema exhibition sector, audience behaviour and the internal leadership and strategy shifts within the Barbican. We have taken the challenges of these changes as an opportunity to reflect on our programme offer, our programming priorities, our working patterns, partnership work and engagement with existing and new audiences.

A particular attention is given to our strategic objectives amidst our limited resources, enabling us to focus our work on improving the cinema experience in our venues, programming a truly international and timely film programme, deepening our understanding and delivery of an accessible cinema experience, while looking after our teams and contributing to the growth of a new generation of cinema programmes.

We have demonstrated the potential attraction of our exclusive offer to sponsors, in the recent successful Campari's sponsorship for our flagship Outdoor Cinema programme. Putting more effort into such partnerships across our programme will enable us to further demonstrate our ambition and expertise, elevating our cinema programme further with a potential for income and audience growth.

### **Report Author**

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