

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Barbican Centre Board	Dated: 29 January 2025
Subject: CEO Report	Public report: For Information
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none">delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes	Diverse Engaged Communities Dynamic Economic Growth Leading Sustainable Environment: Vibrant Thriving Destination Providing Excellent Services
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	-
What is the source of Funding?	-
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	-
Report of:	David Farnsworth, Interim CEO
Report author:	David Farnsworth, Interim CEO

Summary

Below is an update on the Barbican Centre Shared Goals in line with our Strategic Framework

Recommendation

Members are asked to Note the report.

Main Report

EXCITE AND ENGAGE OUR COMMUNITIES AND AUDIENCES

Marketing & Communications

Campaigns

Since Autumn, we have developed a new approach to topline brand awareness campaigns, integrated marcomms campaigns supporting a set of 'seasonal highlight' events alongside brand campaigns. These include the best of the Barbican for the period, not necessarily linked by a theme, and echo the quarterly rhythm of Artistic Programming.

New light boxes at our main entrance

We have 4 new light box panels outside the Silk St entrance. The panels provide additional life, light and colour to our entrance, highlighting who we are and what's on. We are thrilled to now be able to showcase our offer to the public who don't (yet!) enter the building and also through new imagery our Welcome adds to the external look and feel of an Arts Centre.

Brand Project

We have completed the audience research phase of the Barbican Master Brand project which will review and refresh the Barbican brand strategy in line with the Strategic Framework. In conjunction with the development of the new artistic vision, the Brand work is a key programme in the Strategic Framework and will underpin:

- All aspects of our audience experience
- How we communicate to our audiences both current and new
- Design and evolution of our space via Barbican Renewal
- All aspects of our staff/employee/team experience
- How we demonstrate our impact to wide range of stakeholders, partners, artists and donors
- Our role in meeting the Corporation goals of Vibrant Thriving Destination, Dynamic Economic Growth and Flourishing Public Spaces Corporation's Strategic Plan.

Phase 2 will develop the brand positioning, hierarchy and tone of voice and the development of our campaign activity and visual design.

Corporate Communications

We have a new Corporate Communications Plan for 2025, with a focus on building the Barbican's visibility and reputation, to support the delivery of the artistic vision, building renewal, the capital fundraising campaign, and CEO recruitment.

Supported by detailed stakeholder segmentation and channel mapping, we will be focusing on a series of key proactive positive news moments throughout 2025 to

build momentum ahead of a fundraising campaign launch. We will also be looking to raise the profile of our Director team, as well as the permanent CEO once in post.

FUEL CREATIVE AMBITION

Theatre

Our Autumn/Winter season saw the return of RSC for their winter residency with an enchanting double bill; *Buddha of Suburbia*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. *Dream* was well attended by secondary school groups in the run up to the holidays, and families took advantage of the performances playing across the festive break.

In the Pit, the winner of the Oxford Samuel Beckett Trust Theatre Award, *Quiet Songs*. The show is nominated for the Innovation Award at The Stage Awards 2025, winners will be announced on 20th January.

In December we welcomed the revival of our 2021 commission, *First Light*, especially for babies. The hugely positive feedback the show received further encourages us to continue this strand of bespoke programming.

With our spring season already announced, *Mime London* are heading towards sell out, Thomas Ostermeier's production of *The Seagull*, is sold out (with another ticket release due later this month). Our Spring Season launches in mid-January.

In 2024 the Theatre and Dance programme received 27 award nominations, celebrating 6 wins.

Barbican Immersive

Game On finished its run at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh with 75,105 visitors, averaging over 650 visitors on weekends. Out of hours events at the venue attracted a further 1,173 visitors.

We have secured two North American venues for our exhibitions in 2025. *Asian Comics: Evolution of an Artform* will be displayed at the Museum of Pop Culture in Seattle, USA. *AI: More than Human* will travel to Miami, USA for a 3-month run at the Phillip & Patricia Frost Museum of Science.

Our *Music & Sound 2025 exhibition* (working title) will be announced on 13th January 2025 and run from 22nd May – 31st August 2025. Museum of Narratives (MON) is confirmed as co-producer and venue partner in Tokyo, Japan, where the exhibition will tour in 2026.

Cinema

October-December was the busiest season of the year across the Barbican Cinemas, with the programme of major film seasons, visiting festivals, new releases and ScreenTalks.

Rewriting the Rules (October) was a major season of films from the 1970s, 80s and 90s, when filmmakers rewrote the traditional rules of what constituted Indian cinema, curated by Dr Omar Ahmed. Most of the screenings, including Bollywood classic *Deewar* and restored queer rediscovery *Badnam Basti*, sold out. This complemented our Open Weekend and our Visual Arts offering, a cross-arts programming initiative.

Our ambition to be the most accessible cinema in the UK continues, including a special preview of *The Stimming Pool*, followed by a ScreenTalk with the filmmakers. Families continue to be central to our audience priorities, with a successful Family Film Week during October half term and our regular Family Film Club screenings at weekends.

We continued to partner with the film festivals such as Doc'n Roll (including ScreenTalks with Peaches and cult band Devo), London International Animation Festival and the Palestine Film Festival, for which all screenings sold out, including a specially commissioned live performance based on real events in Gaza, performed by Sarah Agha, written and directed by Elias Matar.

ScreenTalks, featured Cate Blanchett, Danielle Deadwyler, Andrew Garfield, Derek Jacobi, Steve McQueen, Denzel Washington and Malala Yousafzai, with special Q&A previews of *A Complete Unknown*, *Conclave*, *Nickel Boys*, *Queer* and *We Live in Time*.

Creative Collaboration

We have a new partnership with the Black British Book Festival. The only literary event of its kind, with 30 events from UK based authors, book marketplace, and workshops for all the family. Audience numbers were 3000, 45% were new bookers and it engaged a majority Black audience from our regular attenders. The event provided learning opportunities on delivering foyer events of this scale going forward, which is a key venue for Creative Collaborations public programming.

For children and young people, Creative Collaborations and Cinema provided drop-in sessions as part of the October half term Family Film Week Festival. And in November young people had a rare opportunity to work with *Wise Children* Associate Director to explore physical storytelling skills in the company style alongside seeing *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

Our school's conservatory program continues to build with new workshops added to the menu. *Conservation Creatures* developed with *Geotone* for primary school pupils with SEN/D complex needs. Our secondary school offer Eco-Poetry Workshop' with poet Esme Allman exploring English, creative writing, and the climate change. All workshops were fully booked, with 344 students attending.

Young Barbican Poets and Film Programmers recruited the 2025 cohort. There were over 270 applicants for poets and 198 for film programmers, including international applicants, for 45 places. The Young Poets Alumni created *Poetry in Practice* installation in the G level Hub, where members of the public could have a poem written for them and gain insight into the creative process.

We have been developing more opportunities for communities to join in offering a range of drop-in workshops: We collaborated with KNMA to deliver a community workshop series. As part of our commitment to artists developing community engaged practice, we offered one of these workshops for British South Asian emerging artist working in this way. We offered clay making and storytelling and music workshop based around the flute and whistling in the Conservatory.

Visual Arts

In early 2025, we open *Citra Sasmita: Into Eternal Land* in the Curve (30 Jan—20 April) and *Noah Davis* in the main gallery (6 February – 11 May 2024)

Discussions are ongoing for a version of our recently closed exhibition *The Imaginary institution of India: Art 1975- 1998* to travel to two other international venues.

We announced *Encounters: Giacometti* that will occupy a new exhibition space on level 2 for one year. Aimed at attracting a new broad audience full price tickets will be kept down to £8 with concessions for Young Barbican members and children of 14 and under. The series is produced in partnership with Foundation Giacometti, Paris.

Music

In October we hosted one of their biggest and most successful Darbar Festivals to date, which took in a weekend of free entry to *The Imaginary Institution of India* exhibition, market stalls, workshops, meditation sessions and world-class performances in the Hall and Milton Court. This is a model we are keen to continue to explore.

UK premieres in the season included Huang Ruo's opera *M Butterfly*, a collaboration with BBC SO, Gorges Ocloo's *The Golden Stool*, presented by LOD Muziktheater , *Spinefex Gum* from Marliya Choir & Gondwana Voices (Cairns), So Percussion and Caroline Shaw's *Rectangles & Circumstance* and a stunning collaboration between Lisa O'Neil and Britten Sinfonia, *Symphony for the Cold Moon*.

The LSO garnered critical acclaim for Helmut Lachenmann's *My Melodies*, Klaus Makela's rendition of *The Rite of Spring* and Pappano's of Puccini's rarely-performed opera *La Rondine*.

INVEST IN OUR PEOPLE AND CULTURE

The first Barbican-wide People Survey was launched in Autumn 2024, which will not only help to set a benchmark against a number of our shard goals but will also allow us to monitor progress. We will now use the survey and its findings to help targeted action planning at organisation-wide, Departmental and Team levels.

REVITALISE OUR PLACE

On 5th December, the Court of Common Council voted to approve £191m in funding across the next five years, to deliver the most critical and transformational projects within the Barbican Renewal Masterplan. With a focus on health and safety, sustainability and inclusivity, these works will be complete in time for the Barbican Centre's 50th anniversary and will ensure it can continue to operate successfully for the next fifty years.

Design work continues on key spaces at the Barbican Centre, and a process of co-design with underrepresented audiences is now embedded. A mid-RIBA stage 3 report was submitted in December and will be costed and reviewed across January. Planning consultation will start at the end of January 2025, through to May that year before a submission in July.

Following an open tender, six companies have been shortlisted for Project Management Consultancy across the next five years of delivery. Interviews will be held in the second week of February and an appointment made shortly after.

An open tender is now live for a wayfinding specialist to develop a scheme that will be implemented before work starts on site, to help visitors navigate during partial closures and eventually to roll out across all spaces. This will be developed in parallel with the Corporation of London's plans for improved wayfinding across the whole Barbican Estate.

Meanwhile, improvements and repairs to key infrastructure and facilities, in particular fire safety systems and WCs, continue across the site.

BUILDING AN ENTERPRISING BUSINESS

Commercial Restaurants

After a brief closure to update and improve, the Bar & Grill will relaunch in February 2025.

The Brasserie will be closing in early February, and we would like to thank Searcy's for all their work.

Business Events

This period saw 63 events delivered across the Barbican; returning clients including GLA, City Bridge Foundation, Red Cross & Baker McKenzie. New clients included My Life, My Say and Utility Warehouse.

We delivered 10 festive parties in the Garden Room, Conservatory and Terrace, selling all but one date that was available to the team, delivering joyful experiences for over 2300 people, before works commenced on netting the Conservatory.

Business Events included 7 Fane talks, corporate conferences and Graduation Ceremonies for Ravensbourne and London Metropolitan University.

Looking ahead, the team are working on events for the first quarter of 2025, with a busy season of graduations in the new year and planning for the World Design Congress 2025, when it returns to London for the first time in over 50 years.

Development

Corporate Membership and Sponsorship: We have achieved 112% of our target, driven by renewals from key Corporate Members, maintaining a 100% retention rate.

We have confirmed renewal from a key sponsor in support of the Outdoor Cinema 2025.

Philanthropy: The area remains strong, supported by continued contributions from Barbican Patrons. We have seen steady growth this year, welcoming 29 new Patrons to date.

Trusts and Grants: We have received pledges from key supporters towards the *Giacometti* series, as well as the Barbican Immersive and Theatre programme. Several major applications are pending decisions for funding towards a cross-arts season spearheaded by the Creative Collaboration department.

WORKING IN LINE WITH OUR VALUES

We are in the implementation phase of the main EDI strategy action plan, the anti-racism action plan, and the access and adjustments action plan.

Our Safeguarding Policy has recently been reviewed, updated and approved by the PCI Subcommittee. The Policy itself has remained largely consistent to previous versions (the last of which was dated February 2023), and changes relate to contact details of key safeguarding contacts and accessibility of the document.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications – our Shared Goals deliver on the 6 Corporate Goals

Financial implications – none

Resource implications –none

Legal implications – none

Risk implications - none

Equalities implications – none

Climate implications – none

Security implications – none

Appendices

None

David Farnsworth

Interim CEO, Barbican Centre