

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Barbican Centre Board	Dated: 08/05/2025
Subject: CEO Report	Public report: For Information
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes • provides statutory duties • provides business enabling functions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diverse Engaged Communities • Dynamic Economic Growth • Leading Sustainable Environment • Vibrant Thriving Destination • Providing Excellent Services • Flourishing Public Spaces
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	n/a
What is the source of Funding?	n/a
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	n/a
Report of:	David Farnsworth, Interim CEO
Report author:	David Farnsworth, Interim CEO

Summary

The following is a summary of activity across our Strategic Framework and Shared Goals from January to March 2025.

Recommendation

Members are asked to

- Note the report.

Main Report

Current Position

EXCITE AND ENGAGE OUR AUDIENCES AND COMMUNITIES

Audience Experience

Service: building better feedback data

We are committed to ensuring that the perspectives, thoughts, and feedback of our audiences remain at the heart of our planning and decision-making processes. It is essential for us not only to understand the impact of the events and facilities we offer but also to work collaboratively with our audiences in assessing the services and experiences provided at every point of interaction. These insights always directly inform large-scale initiatives, such as Barbican Renewal. However, we are also focused on enhancing the ways in which we regularly incorporate the voices of our visitors to plan and prioritise incremental improvements.

In this period, we further developed how we engage audiences, both in the Centre and online, to detail their experiences, feedback and ideas. Through manual and digital categorisation, we're now building improved data analysis to better understand priorities, target any required improvements and measure the impact of any changes. This data will also guide our communications regarding progress updates, whether on longer-term plans or smaller interventions, to better support our audiences.

One of the most rewarding aspects of this work is the ability to capture and share the significant amount of positive feedback we receive across our teams. Celebrating our successes while simultaneously reflecting on areas for improvement is an essential part of our ongoing development.

Next steps include refining our feedback categorisation, measuring the delivery of identified improvements and expanding the channels through which audiences are able to engage with us.

Adding value: Bloomberg Connects

Bloomberg Connects, an initiative from Bloomberg Philanthropies, is a free app for users to explore expert-curated content and guides to over 800 cultural spaces around the world, including museums, galleries, sculpture parks and gardens.

We are pleased to commence implementation of the app, which will support connecting people with our offer through free content, wayfinding and guided user journeys.

Tickets now available in Apple Wallet & Google Wallet

Recent customer feedback highlighted that, due to poor mobile reception, audiences were struggling to open ticket emails on their mobile devices. Connecting to WiFi can be effective, but takes additional time that audiences often do not have, causing a last-minute inconvenience.

To solve this pain point for our customers, we successfully implemented Apple Wallet and Google Wallet functionality for Barbican-issued tickets, allowing customers to conveniently download tickets directly to their phones

We are always investing in our digital audience experience and during our July meeting we will share more about our approach to user improvements.

Barbican Estate: Visitor Management Plan

We are working with the Barbican Association on a light-touch update to the Visitor Management Plan, which sets out the operational steps we must take to reasonably minimise disturbance to surrounding residents.

Retail

The last quarter of 24/25 (Q4 Jan-March 2025) was our second busiest trading quarter of the 24/25 financial year, after Q3. Sales in this period were driven by the extremely well attended programme, including *Noah Davis* and *The Seagull*.

Over 1,700 Noah Davis catalogues have been sold since Feb. The catalogue topped our best sellers list by sales value for Q4. Second to the catalogue was the runaway success of the 'Cate Blanchett' t-shirt, by the independent, female-owned business Girls on Tops. Selling over 900 units to date, this was a wonderful addition to the retail offer, becoming a must-have and driving audiences into the shop.

In Q4, we sold nearly 3,000 Seagull programmes through the shop tills. The Barbican tote came a close second, with 2,733 units sold. With a 65% margin, the tote is one of our most profitable lines selling at volume and we are looking forward to a refreshed set of colourways arriving this spring.

2024/5 retail success stories:

- The updated '*Residents*' book, re-published in September 2024 in collaboration with Hoxton Mini Press, sold 800 units.
- A Development and Retail Team collaboration with HighSnobiety; developing co-branded apparel, in return netting a partnership fee and driving onsite and online sales with a capsule range stocked by the Barbican Shop. This was a

great opportunity to reach a new audience, whilst also testing our licencing potential.

- A sell out range of limited-edition ceramics for Noah Davis with ceramicist Chris Bramble.
- Supporting Black Designers and Makers in the Noah Davis shop and the Foyer Shop, working closely with small and local businesses, building ongoing relationships with new suppliers.
- Introducing the 'Design Edit' for Christmas, reaching an audience looking for high end, design focussed gifts.
- Blind Date with a Book (BDWAB) – BDWAB came back again for Valentine's Day and International Women's Day, giving our customers a chance to pick up a surprise. It was a hit, with over 260 units sold in 4 weeks.

Looking ahead:

- *Feel the Sound*, and the summer *Frequencies* campaign, with a new range of products influenced by music and sound hitting the ground floor in May.
- A re-vamp to our Home and Children's offer will take place over the coming months, giving these two categories a fresh new look and a new position in the Shop ready for the summer.
- Sourcing and buying for Dirty Looks and the winter gifting season is under way.

Audience engagement

Concrete Garden: Spring Brand Campaign

Seasonal brand campaigns have been implemented to engage audiences through a centralised seasonal theme.

Throughout spring, the Noah Davis exhibition has been the key focus of our first seasonal cross-artform programme, Concrete Garden, which draws from Davis's work to appeal to a broader audience, encouraging them to embrace the seasonally appropriate themes of renewal and transformation.

The season launched in early February and since then, over 40,000 tickets have been sold for Concrete Garden events (including Noah Davis) with 1,660 having booked more than one Concrete Garden event (for example and exhibition and a talk).

Brand Project: our identity

The Barbican brand work is on-track with brand positioning, hierarchy and tone of voice in final stages of consultation. Over 150 colleagues across the Barbican, the

Barbican Board & Trust, and City of London Corporation have provided thoughtful and useful feedback, which is being incorporated. It is expected that final positioning will be presented in the coming months.

Telling the Story: Corporate Communications Highlights

We continue to deliver our Corporate Communications strategy, with a focus on using eye-catching news moments to communicate the Barbican's objectives and impact and build a sense of momentum. Since January, these moments have included: the public consultation on Barbican Renewal; the announcement of our summer theme 'Frequencies'; and the announcement of our Harris Academies partnership and the expanded Young Barbican scheme, linked to the launch of Culture Mile BID's Art for All report.

Press coverage highlights

- ITV London News ran a TV feature on Barbican Renewal, featuring an interview with Philippa Simpson, Director for Buildings and Renewal, in the Barbican's Plant Room, and with Marta Lowcewicz, Head Gardener, in the Barbican Conservatory. Watch back [here](#).
- [Hoxton Radio](#) interviewed Karena Johnson, Head of Creative Collaboration, in March where she discussed the Barbican's Concrete Garden programme and Creative Collaboration's projects.
- *The Seagull* opened to 4- and 5-star reviews, including 5* from [The Evening Standard](#), [Daily Express](#), and [The Mail On Sunday](#).
- The Noah Davis exhibition in Barbican Art Gallery received stellar reviews across the national newspapers, led by Alastair Sooke's 5* in the [Daily Telegraph](#), describing the survey as "spellbinding, spine-tingling, expertly marshalled".
- Devyani Saltzman, Director for Arts & Participation, wrote an editorial for the Evening Standard commenting on the importance of creativity in the school curriculum, highlighting the Culture Mile BID Art for All report (to which the Barbican contributed) and announcing our Harris Academies partnership and planned Young Barbican expansion.

FUEL CREATIVE AMBITION

Theatre

The Seagull closed on May 5 after a tremendous run of packed houses and standing ovations. Bookings for *Fiddler on the Roof* are responding positively to its win of 'Best Musical Revival Award' at the Olivier Awards.

In April, we turned our stage into a jazz club to welcome back the staging of Charles Mingus' legendary album *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady*, delivered by award-winning performance company Clod Ensemble and the cutting-edge Nu Civilisation Orchestra. Audience members can sit back with a drink and just listen to the music or get up and join in the dance.

Shortly after, Teatro La Plaza from Peru took over the stage with their interpretation of *Hamlet*. Two other main house shows to come are Beckett's Krapp's *Last Tape* with celebrated stage and film actor Stephen Rea and the exciting *A Night with Boy Blue* featuring over 160 young dancers. We will be also welcoming two new companies making their debut to the Pit.

Barbican Immersive

In the first quarter of 2025, we continued production on in-house projects and touring productions.

Feel the Sound: An Exhibition on a Different Frequency, was announced in February and garnered significant press interest, particularly on using the Barbican's carparks as an exhibition space for the first time. In conjunction with the exhibition, Barbican Immersive will also present its first multiuser, virtual reality (VR) experience simultaneously in the Pit Theatre. Created in 2021, *In Pursuit of Repetitive Beats* is an internationally acclaimed, award-winning interactive VR adventure.

Produced by East City Films and created by Darren Emerson, this ground-breaking experience takes audiences on a multi-sensory journey back to 1989, immersing them in the euphoric rave scene that revolutionised music and society. For its presentation at the Barbican, a new version of the piece is being developed, allowing four visitors to simultaneously experience the world and story together.

AI: More Than Human opens at The Phillip and Patricia Frost Museum of Science in Miami on May 30, 2025. This will be the first time the exhibition has visited the United States.

Asian Comics: Evolution of an Art Form opened at the Museum of Pop Culture in Seattle on March 7. By the end of March, it had attracted over 12,000 visitors.

Music

Music opened the year with a surge of young talent, with a National Youth Orchestra (free for teens) concert, followed by a long-awaited tour from Simon Bolivar Symphony Orchestra, featuring two sold-out concerts and an inspiring day of workshops at Central Foundation Boys School.

The Czech Philharmonic's 2-day residency was a sell-out. Wynton Marsalis and Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra and Youth Orchestra returned in March for a 3-day residency. This included a partnership concert with Guildhall School of Music and Drama, free stage events over the weekend, workshops in Hackney's Bridge Academy, a collaboration with the London Symphony Orchestra and their own *Democracy! Suite* gig.

Other highlights of this season included a rare performance by Kim Deal, former front-woman of The Breeders and Pixies, Shirley Thompson's *Women of the Windrush*, and Jordi Savall's multi-national Silk Road exploration, *Ibn Battuta*.

Premieres and Barbican commissions during this period included David Fennessy's *Bog Cantata*, a co-commission with Dunedin Consort, Shiva Feshareki's *Bab-Khaneh*, a co-commission with BBC Symphony Orchestra, and the UK premiere of Davóne Tines's *ROBESON*, a musical exploration of Paul Robeson's political life.

We worked with UnSound Festival in Krakow to bring new work by Mica Levi and Mabe Fratti to our stage, and with Brick Lane Jazz Festival to create the ambitious collaboration between US trumpeter Theo Croker, London-based jazz musicians and fashion designer Nicholas Daley, *Dream Manifest*. This was the first of the new cross-arts programming seasons, with a Barbican debut from F* Choir and a new commission for Belinda Zhawi responding to Noah Davis exhibition.

Visual Arts

The Visual Arts team is preparing the installation of *Huma Bhabha. Encounters: Giacometti* that opens to the public on 8 May. The first in a series of three exhibitions produced with Foundation Giacometti, Paris, this exhibition with Huma Bhabha is in partnership with the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi. Tickets are now on sale at an accessible price of £8 (£6 young Barbican) and £5 ticket offers available to audiences attending another ticketed Barbican event on the same day. Members are able to see the exhibition for free.

Citra Sasmita: Into Eternal Land in the Curve (30 Jan—20 April) and *Noah Davis* (6 February – 11 May 2024) have both been received positively by press and audiences.

Noah Davis will tour to Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (opening 8 June) and then to the Philadelphia Museum of Art later in the year.

Dirty Looks, opening in September in the main Gallery, and *Lucy Raven: Rounds*, opening in October in The Curve, have both been announced.

Creative Collaboration

Public and participatory programming increased in the first months of 2025. This included; a series of talks and workshops centered around the conservatory and *Concrete Garden* inspired by the Noah Davis exhibition and a five-part public program series across February and March. Both events were well received, particularly around the expanded opening hours of the Conservatory. We also launched our *Home: Figure and Portrait Drawing workshop sessions* led by visual artist Honey Williams, where participants could learn a range of drawing techniques and create a body to be exhibited in a community exhibition in April.

In February we presented the ClubStage event, *Wu-Lu, Denzel Himself & SHEIVA*, which sold out to a capacity crowd. We aim to make Clubstage a regular feature in the coming year.

In March we produced our second *Young Barbican Takeover* for over 600 attendees. Activities included; talks; screenings; and a literary salon with publishers Penguin and Silver Press. As part of the Takeover, the free stage bands collaborated with *So Young Magazine*, and received an enthusiastic response from audiences.

Alongside our regular Young Film Programmers and Young Poets courses, we focused on expanding opportunities for the alumni of these successful, long-running programmes. We supported 75 Young Poets with new commissions and performance opportunities and organised master class with the international award-winning poet, essayist and academic, Claudia Rankine.

Our monthly *Conservatory Days*, welcomed 270 students and 45 teachers. Sessions included Conservation Creatures for KS2 students, Eco-Poetry workshops for KS3 students and self-led creative activities, for students at Special Educational Needs Schools. We also produced a Careers Insight Morning as part of the London Careers Festival, where Year 10 students spoke to a range of colleagues and explored creative roles at the Barbican.

As part of ambition to refocus our community work towards hyper-localised, high-impact and intergenerational lifelong learning, we launched *Barbican Community Choir* with choir masters Abdul Shyllon and Rachel Huggins. During these weekly sessions participants learn how to use their voice as an instrument, learn to sing different genres of music and gain the confidence and experience to perform in front of a live audience.

Cinema

Masterpieces of the Iranian New Wave, externally curated by Ehsan Khoshbakht, a showcase of ground-breaking films from 1962-1977, opened in February. The season sold out, allowing us to programme additional screenings of the most popular titles. This is now the most popular season in Barbican Cinema history, with 34% new bookers.

We also held the first event of our new Animation strand in February, with a sold-out Cinema 1 for *In This Corner of the World* and a recorded introduction from the director, Sunao Katabuchi.

We linked our New Releases and ScreenTalks to the BAFTA and Oscar awards seasons, confirming that larger distributors are increasingly thinking about the Barbican as a key release venue. Our gross box office for key titles put us amongst the top UK exhibitors.

Sold out ScreenTalks included: actor Guy Pearce (*Memento*); director Mike Leigh and Actor Michele Austin (*Hard Truths*); actor Jessie Eisenberg (*A Real Pain*); actor

Pamela Anderson (*The Last Showgirl*); director. Joshua Oppenheimer and actor George MacKay (*The End*).

Family Film Club also saw a strong start to the year with our signature blend of new titles, International Women's Day shorts, and cult classics. We welcomed guest talks and held interactive draw-along sessions and creative workshops in the Cinema for children.

We held a full-house screening in Cinema 1 for *Wallace and Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl*, which included a Q&A segment from Aardman creators Nick Park and Merlin Crossingham. We also welcomed the BAFTA-winning Director Susanna White for a Q&A segment while introducing *Nanny McPhee* and the *Big Bang*.

Our twice-weekly Parent and Baby screenings continue to be a regular meeting point for new parents/guardians and their babies to share the best new releases and arts cinema titles in an environment specially tailored for them. We receive consistent verbal and written feedback about the relaxed atmosphere that we create and the facilities we provide, including sensory toys and baby books for those who wish to remain in our spaces after the screenings.

In 2024/25, as a result of our bespoke, curated programme, we surpassed both financial targets and audience numbers, providing the team a stable platform to continue building from in 25/26.

BUILD AN ENTERPRISING BUSINESS

Commercial

Business Events – Event Management

In Q4 of 24/25, the Business Events team delivered a wide range of activities including 11 events in the Barbican Hall (3 graduation ceremonies, 3 conferences including the returning Product Con and Women in Tech SEO events and 5 Fane talks with sell out audiences for Elizabeth Day, Fi Glover and Jane Garvey). A further 72 events were also delivered comprising a mix of returning clients as well as new business including the 'Voices of Faith Festival'.

In April, we launched our new spring and summer menus where Searcys demonstrated their sustainability commitments with a revised set of pledges in 2025 (Inclusion by Design, Nurturing and Growing Talent, Progressive Partnerships and Step Up. This includes committing to making over 25% of their menu dishes plant-based or vegetarian by the end of 2025, highlighting the trend for more sustainable food choices and working with more local (33) and London (14) based food partners. The sales team have also been busy representing the Barbican at 6 trade events over the last 3 months. These include the micebook Expo, the London Summer Party Show and Successful Meetings University International. The purpose of these events is to receive booking enquiries, showcase the brand, and for awareness.

Commercial Development (Restaurants/Bars/Car Parks)

The new Barbican Bar & Grill on Level 1 re-opened on schedule in early March in time for *The Seagull*. The Brasserie furniture was repurposed, alongside added banquette seating, improved lighting and softening the space to create a more intimate setting. The new menu provides the best of both venues with a price point £10 less than the Brasserie.

The Barbican Kitchen saw record sales in March and a new tapas offer in the evening has been very successful with food and service being priority drivers.

Development

Corporate Membership and Sponsorship: We achieved 126% of our target, driven by key Corporate Member renewals and maintaining a 100% retention rate. Additionally, we secured a confirmed renewal from a key sponsors in support of the Outdoor Cinema 2025 and *Feel the Sound*.

Philanthropy: This area remains strong, supported by continued contributions from Barbican Patrons. We have seen steady growth this year, welcoming 41 new Patrons in 24/25.

Trusts and Grants: We received pledges from key supporters towards the Theatre and Dance and Music programmes. Several major applications are pending decisions for funding towards a cross-arts season, spearheaded by the Creative Collaboration department.

REVITALISE OUR PLACE

Following confirmation of funding, Barbican Renewal has progressed at speed. A mid-stage review of designs was undertaken (RIBA 3) and cost plans were updated.

In preparation for the formal planning decision process, we held a public consultation in February with a series of presentations, webinars, online content and an onsite display. In total, c. 4,000 people attended the display, and many more engaged online, providing invaluable feedback on plans. 88-90% of participants said they support or strongly support the plans, a ringing endorsement of the work to date. Further consultation is planned for May.

Health and Safety: work is ongoing to identify improvements and additional works needed to address issues of compliance and best practice. Work is also in preparation for the implementation of Martyn's Law, across the Audiences and Buildings divisions in particular.

INVEST IN OUR PEOPLE AND CULTURE

The Barbican People Survey results were communicated to all colleagues in January and they were subsequently asked to recommend actions to create both local and Centre-wide Action Plans. Suggested actions and feedback will feed into wider strategies across the Centre and will support delivering action at organisational, departmental and Team levels.

WORKING IN LINE WITH OUR VALUES

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The most recent biannual EDI Strategy update was sent to the PCI Subcommittee in January, and the next will be sent in June. In summary, the January report points toward considerable progress since the launch of the strategy in 2023, with most of the desired competencies being met on schedule. There are some delays in key competency areas which we believe will be resolved through the implementation of the new People, Culture and Inclusion Strategy.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

Strategic implications – our Shared Goals align with the Corporate Plan 2024 - 9

Financial implications – none

Resource implications – none

Legal implications – none

Risk implications – none

Equalities implications – within report

Climate implications – within report

Security implications – within report

Appendices

None

David Farnsworth

Interim CEO