

## City of London Corporation Committee Report

<b>Committee(s):</b> Barbican Centre Board	<b>Dated:</b> 17/07/2025
<b>Subject:</b> CEO Report	<b>Public report:</b> For Information
<b>This proposal:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes</b></li></ul>	Diverse Engaged Communities Dynamic Economic Growth Leading Sustainable Environment Vibrant Thriving Destination Providing Excellent Services Flourishing Public Spaces
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	No
<b>If so, how much?</b>	-
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	N/A
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?</b>	N/A
<b>Report of:</b>	David Farnsworth, Interim CEO
<b>Report author:</b>	David Farnsworth, Interim CEO

### Summary

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

### Recommendation

Members are asked to Note the report.

# Main Report

## Current Position

### EXCITE AND ENGAGE OUR COMMUNITIES AND AUDIENCES

#### Audience Experience

##### *Audience Strategy implementation*

In 2023 the Board endorsed the Barbican Audience Strategy, which aims for us to:

- increase and diversify our audiences, while retaining existing audiences.
- be data informed in our audience-related decision making.
- build the capability and culture of the Barbican to ensure audiences are at the heart of what we do and why we do it.
- be enterprising in our approach, building revenues from our venues and customer businesses to reinvest in our programme and customer experiences.

We are now in the process of setting key performance indicators (KPIs) and our roadmap of work to deliver on the outcomes above.

The Visitor Experience Plan mentioned in previous reports will demonstrate the role that the Audiences directorate plays in delivering this strategy and the shifts needed for the Barbican to grow audience satisfaction and engagement. We look forward to sharing this with the Board in October 2025.

##### *Spotlight: Retail*

The Barbican's retail team is exceeding targets and income to date is ahead of last year.

In this year's first quarter, we saw the continued positive reaction to the Noah Davis offer in the Gallery Shop. The catalogue sold just over 3,000 copies during the show (1,300 in the final 6 weeks, April to mid-May).

The ten best performing items by sales value included seven of our own Barbican developed products and three publications (one being the Noah Davis catalogue). A t-shirt, developed in-house featuring the work *40 Acres and a Unicorn*, sold out and over 400 units of the Noah Davis exhibition tote bag were sold.

The Foyer Shop has had a great start in the first quarter of this financial year, benefitting from the last few performances of *The Seagull* ending in early April, with over 370 'Cate Blanchett' t-shirts sold in the final few days, and over 1,000 t-shirts in total across the run. We worked closely with the supplier, *Girls on Tops*, to ensure

that 'name' t-shirts were available throughout the run, however, there were occasions when demand for 'Cate' outstripped supply.

There have been some changes to the shop floor layout including our Rough Trade concession moving to the ground floor, where it is now joined by a co-branded Rough Trade x Barbican photobooth. This move supported the *Feel the Sound* inspired retail offer, and the photobooth has generated interest and footfall into the shop since it was introduced in late May. *Feel the Sound* products include a mix of publications, gift items and apparel. Popular items include: a portable Theremin; retailing for £130; music-related t-shirts; and a selection of products featuring the ubiquitous 'acid house smiley' in a nod to the *In Pursuit of Repetitive Beats* virtual reality (VR) experience.

## **Audience Engagement**

### *Summer Brand Campaign – Frequencies*

The Barbican's summer campaign *Frequencies: the sounds that shape us* has been an exciting opportunity to drive young people to the Centre across a range of programming including *Feel the Sound*, *Rebel Radio* and *In Pursuit of Repetitive Beats*.

The marketing campaign has leaned heavily on lesser utilised digital channels for the Barbican including TikTok, Pmax and Google Things to Do, a matrix of partnerships with industry leaders, Sonar Festival, Crack Magazine, Dezeen and Trippin' and the launch of a new email newsletter, Barbican Dispatch. The newsletter already has over 15,000 new subscribers driven via a lead-generation campaign on social media targeting young people.

Engagement with this campaign has improved compared to our Spring *Concrete Garden* campaign, demonstrating that audiences will engage more heavily in concepts that are more relatable to who they are and what they care about.

### *Communications Highlights: Telling our Story*

- Launched Art for All, which is a City of London Corporation (CoL) Culture Mile BID report. This featured Karena Johnson, Head of Creative Collaboration, at a panel discussion, supported by Devyani Saltzman, Director for Arts and Participation, opinion pieces in City AM and the Standard.
- National media coverage for Simon Armitage's Freedom of the City, which took place in the Barbican Conservatory.
- We welcomed Marie Colangelo, our new External Affairs Manager, and are beginning a more strategic approach to stakeholder engagement.
- Phillipa Simpson, Director for Buildings and Renewal, represented the Barbican at a DCMS roundtable, the Clerkenwell Design Festival, and the

Future Cities Forum. Devyani took part in a panel discussion on leadership at Oxford University.

- The second round of Renewal consultation closed with 93% approval and coverage in Time Out, BBC News, among other key outlets.
- We marked, with deep thanks, the departure of Chair of the Barbican Trust, Farmida Bi and other Barbican Trustees on our LinkedIn channel.
- We were pleased to host the City of London Corporation Town Clerk Live in Cinema 1, presenting a wonderful opportunity for internal engagement with the wider Corporation team.
- Our LinkedIn has grown to nearly 90k followers, ranking 4th in engagement among global peers.

## **FUEL CREATIVE AMBITION**

### **Theatre**

Our spring season consisted of four exciting own promotions; the return of the participatory dance show *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady*; a groundbreaking reimagining of *Hamlet* by Teatro la Plaza from Peru; Stephen Rea's beautiful study of solitude in *Beckett's Krapp's Last Tape*; and a jubilant showcase of talent by the young people of Boy Blue.

The summer season is underway with *Fiddler on the Roof*. This classic musical transferred from Regent's Park Open Air Theatre, where it won the Olivier Award for Best Musical Revival, and has received myriad of 4- and 5-star reviews since opening at the Barbican. This will be followed by Tony-award winning actor Sean Hayes in his play *Goodnight, Oscar*, opening on 6 August. Both productions are produced by Trafalgar Entertainment in the second year of our three-year relationship.

We have now launched our autumn season and are proud to present two extraordinary international productions from France and Latvia in the main Theatre, and offer an array of innovative gems in the Pit, including an immersive show for babies that hails from Spain. The Royal Shakespeare Company winter season will be announced in July.

### **Barbican Immersive**

The summer season began with the launch of *Feel the Sound*, our new multi-sensory exhibition taking place throughout the Centre from the Silk Street entrance to The Curve, Foyers, Lakeside, and, for the first time ever, Car Park 5. Alongside the exhibition, we worked with East City Films to deliver the UK's biggest VR experience, *In Pursuit of Repetitive Beats* in the Pit Theatre.

The exhibition has been well received. We have also listened customer feedback and have responded to some of the more technical challenges of the exhibition, altering staff levels and opening times in order to ensure a cost-effective operation and a smooth customer experience, which has been well received.

Across our touring programme, May saw the opening of *AI: More than Human* at the Frost Science Museum in Miami, Florida, USA, where over 11,200 visited the exhibition during its first week. The show will remain there until September. *Asian Comics: Evolution of an Artform* welcomed 35,030 visitors in its first three months at the Museum of Pop Culture (MOPOP) in Seattle, Washington, USA, with positive reactions from press, audiences, and on social media. The exhibition is open until January 2026, and we are working on the next steps of its tour following significant interest from other venues.

We also publicly announced our partnership with ORION, sharing news that Barbican Immersive will curate new content for a hi-spec digital screen open to the public as part of the St. Paul's Panorama development.

## **Cinema**

*Queer East*, now in its sixth year, returned with its biggest film offering yet, including LGBTQ films from Cambodia, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand. This included rare, sold-out screenings of featurettes by Taiwanese female filmmaking pioneer Jo-Fei Chen and a ScreenTalk with Japanese director Akihiro Suzuki.

*New East Cinema*, our regular strand celebrating new films from post-Communist and post-Soviet states across Eastern Europe and Central Asia, continued with a sold-out screening of *Toxic*, a Lithuanian drama about teenage models, which won the top prize at the Locarno Film Festival. Director Saulė Bliuvaitė joined us on stage for a ScreenTalk after the film.

As part of the 2025 *Open City Documentary Festival*, we hosted a series of standout screenings and events. Highlights included the UK premiere of Maeve Brennan's *Siticulosa*, an exploration of antiquities trafficking, and *Available Light*, a special programme of new UK artist documentaries followed by a ScreenTalk. The season also featured international retrospectives, including Ogawa Productions' *Sanrizuka – Heta Village*, and a selection of politically charged and experimental works, amplifying the Barbican's role in championing innovative non-fiction film.

In April, as part of *Cinema Restored*, we screened a 4K restoration of Bachtar Siagian's neorealist film *Turang*, tracing a freedom fighter's refuge in an occupied village which was introduced by the director's daughter.

The *Fashion in Film Festival* returned after eight years with an ambitious programme exploring the relationship between fashion and nature through the lens of cinema. We partnered on four screenings, including two tying in with Cinema's regular programming series for families (FFC) and silent film and live music. The silent

screening was one of the most ambitious ever mounted in our screens, involving a bespoke programme of 20 early silent short films (or excerpts of films) on the theme of women and flowers, accompanied by a new score from a 26-strong avant-garde choir, Musarc.

May saw the second in our *Animation at War* series take place with a packed screening of *When the Wind Blows* in Cinema 1. Children's literary critic Nicolette Jones and BFI National Archive curator took part in a panel chaired by curator Michael Leader, unpicking the medium and the conditions that made the film possible.

ScreenTalks for *The Salt Path*, and *The Ballad of Wallis Island* both sold out. *The Salt Path* ScreenTalk was presented in collaboration with Reclaim the Frame, a UK-based initiative that aims to champion films made by women and non-binary filmmakers, and to build audiences for these films. In attendance were Raynor Winn, the author of the memoir the film is based on, and screenwriter Rebecca Lenkiwicz. The talk was hosted by Melanie Iredale, the director of Reclaim the Frame. *The Ballad of Wallis Island* ScreenTalk was with comedians and co-writers Tom Basden and Tim Key, plus director James Griffiths.

## **Creative Collaboration**

In this season our learning programs partnered with *Right to the City: Youth Design Challenge* to support students from Haggerston School imagine how spaces in the City could be made safer and more joyful for young women and non-binary young people. The school has been selected as one of the winners of the 11-15 age category and will receive their prize at an award ceremony in July. We also presented Refugee Week Schools Screening including a presentation and discussion led by Ali Ghaderi from Babylon Migrants.

In April the *Chronic Youth Film Festival* celebrated its 10th anniversary with a program called *Against All Odds: Resilience, community, and memory on screen* curated by 25 young film programmers. Screenings, workshops and discussions were attended by 1,341 people over three days.

Two of our *Barbican Young Poets* performed at the Poet Laureate Simon Armitage Freedom of City Award ceremony event which was held at the Barbican.

The refocus of community work on participation began with visual arts workshops inspired by the work of Noah Davis with the *Home Community Exhibition*. Participants aged from 3 to 79 contributed over 200 artworks to the exhibition presented in a maximalist flat in the lakeside foyer.

The *Barbican Community Choir* completed their first spring term with a sharing; 49 members performed for friends and family after only 10 weeks.

During the Easter holidays, the Communities team, in partnership with the Cinema team, delivered a weeklong *Film Club Animation Workshop* for 11–16-year-olds.

creative project. Using 16mm film participants made their own short animations with multidisciplinary artist Nia Fekri.

In public programming we concluded the Concrete Garden series with *Black Worlding* featuring Alberta Whittle, Phoebe Boswell and Julian Knox.

Another sold out ClubStage event this spring featured *Wu-Lu, Denzel Himself & SHEIVA*. In June we launched *Rebel Radio* with a live broadcast from Reprezent Radio featuring giants of pirate radio Daddy Ernie, DJ spoony and Skinny Man. We paired this with our podcast commission launch, *Gaps in the Dial*, in our bespoke listening hub.

## Visual Arts

*Encounters: Giacometti x Huma Bhabha* is now open in a new temporary exhibition space on Level 2 of the Barbican. We created the space in response to opportunities enabled by Barbican Renewal which has allowed us to try a new model of a smaller, lower cost exhibition offer. The opening hours of this show are Tues – Sat 12noon - 6.30/7pm pm allowing a pre-Theatre crowd to attend the exhibition, although these may be adjusted once we have reviewed audience visiting patterns. Members visit for free and we continue with our commitment to key ticket concessions in line with audience development priorities, as well as introducing a 'bolt on' offer of a £5 ticket when purchased the same day as another ticketed event at the Barbican.

The programme in this space was developed in partnership with the Giacometti Foundation in Paris, allowing our audiences to access this incredible collection in an intimate gallery space. *Encounters* is also a partnership with Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, Delhi (KNMA), our third collaboration with them.

The forward programme in this space until the end of 25/26 will be:

*Encounters: Giacometti x Huma Bhabha* – 8 May to 10 Aug 2025, Level 2

*Encounters: Giacometti x Mona Hatoum* – 3 Sept to 11 Jan 2026, Level 2

*Encounters: Giacometti x Lynda Benglis* – 5 Feb to 24 May 2026, Level 2

Touring and co-production work has continued during this period with *Noah Davis* opening at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles on 8 June. This exhibition will also tour to Philadelphia Museum of Art in spring 2026.

## Music

Seasonal cross-arts programming included US pianist Jason Moran, who gave two outstanding recitals/talks as part of the Concrete Garden in May as well as new commissions from Belinda Zhawi. The Music programme for our Frequencies season included a focus on Warp Records, artists Moin, Suzanne Ciani, Actress, Ligeti Quartet and Jeff Mills with the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO).

A string of major performances drew 5 star reviews this spring including: Handel's *Jephtha with Il Pomo d'Oro*; Michael Spyres and Joyce di Donato; Louise Alder starring in Handel's *Giulio Cesare*; Simon Rattle's *Excursions of Mr Broucek*; and Gustavo Dudamel's explosive debut with the LSO.

The National Open Youth Orchestra for young musicians who are pioneering adaptive instruments gave a moving performance in Milton Court. This is a collaborative project connected to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Creative Collaboration, and our own Music team.

Our newest associate, Darbar, brought over 2,000 people to the first of their special focus days, this one on Guru Nanak. We also marked Terry Riley's 90th birthday with *Bang on a Can* and a diverse range of London musicians. Canadian-Sudanese musician and poet Mustafa drew a sell-out new young audience (55% new bookers), while pianists Lang Lang and Seong-Jin Cho also drew new audiences, (40%, 44% new bookers respectively).

## **INVEST IN OUR PEOPLE AND CULTURE**

Following approval at May's Board meeting, our new People, Culture and Inclusion (PCI) strategy is now in place. Our people are central to realising the Barbican's ambitions—from creating exceptional audience experiences to driving innovation, impact, and belonging in every interaction.

The PCI Strategy was co-designed and is built around three strategic pillars and supported by three strategic enablers, designed to drive meaningful and measurable transformation:

### **Strategic Pillars:**

1. Develop a Connected, High-Performing Culture
2. Attract and Retain the Best Talent
3. Create Inclusive Experiences for All

### **Strategic Enablers:**

1. Excellent Business Partnering Services - Trusted people support, advice, and employee relations
2. Building Brilliant Basics - Streamlined processes, better systems, and insightful people data
3. Contribution and Reward - Fair pay, benefits, and recognition aligned with Ambition 25

Implementation of this strategy will achieve our strategic goal of Investing in Our People and Culture. It will work in collaboration with the ambitions of the wider City of London People initiatives and People strategy.



## REVITALISE OUR PLACE

Design development for Barbican Renewal continues to progress well, with RIBA Stage 3 design completed on the major projects being delivered during this phase of the programme (Conservatory, Foyers, Lakeside, Catering Block, infrastructure).

A planning application is now being developed for submission in July 2025, which will mark a major milestone for the programme.

In advance of planning submission, the latest round of public consultation took place from 19 May to 2 June. This consultation again demonstrated a very high level of public support for proposals, with approval rates for projects within the programme ranging from 92-95%.

Gardiner & Theobald have started work as Project Management Consultants on the Barbican Renewal programme. Early work included holding a series of meetings with Barbican Heads of Departments to help inform the development of a master programme for delivering this first phase of Renewal works. This programme will be consulted on internally through the autumn before being finalised by the end of 2025.

A soft market testing exercise recently launched to explore potential future uses for the currently vacant Exhibition Halls. This exercise is being run in collaboration with the City Surveyor and Chamberlain to understand potential market interest and future possibilities to fully utilise these unique spaces.

Expressions of interest will be reviewed to assess the social, commercial and environmental impact of different options before a recommendation on next steps is made to Members later in 2025.

## BUILDING AN ENTERPRISING BUSINESS

### Commercial

#### *Restaurants and Bars*

Our work in the Barbican Kitchen to improve customer service continues and we are working with Benugo to deliver measurable statistics and KPI's in 2025.

Improvements to the counters and seating area continue, with some new chairs, refurbished tables, warmer lighting and repainting. This is further enhanced by new bench seating to separate the seating area from the drinks collection station, to improve the customer experience and flow.

The Barbican Bar & Grill refurbishments are now complete and the terrace is open with new furniture. May has been a challenging month with reduced Theatre activity in the Centre (*Fiddler on the Roof* opened in late May), but early indications suggest it will be a successful summer, thanks to strong interest in *Fiddler* and good weather – the terrace doubles our capacity. We launched a new menu in mid-May, focusing on dishes that can be prepared quickly.

In collaboration with Barbican Immersive and Verdant Brewing Co, a new *Feel The Sound* branded lager launched in our Bars. The can is fully wrapped in the exhibition design and selling well, especially during contemporary music events. We will also be selling on selected hot days on the Lakeside throughout the summer.

### *Business Events*

Over 70 events have been delivered since May. These included the eagerly awaited Inaugural South by Southwest London Festival (SXSW). We were one of 34 London venues who hosted events during this week-long festival, seen as the launchpad for game-changing innovation and ideas.

Other highlights include: the world premiere red-carpet screening of *Deep Cover* in the Barbican Hall; a further seven world and UK premier screenings of other titles in Cinema 1; and a red carpet and screening for Netflix's *Squid Games* season 3 and *Too Much*.

We also delivered 13 events in the Hall including: seven graduation ceremonies; three in-conversation events with Fane Productions (Guenther Steiner, Niall Harbison and Gillian Anderson); The Wine Society returned for their Annual General Meeting; and two major corporate conferences.

### **Development**

Deutsche Bank renewed their Corporate Membership for a second year. We are delighted to continue to engage their people with the wealth of the Barbican's cultural offer.

We continue to welcome new Patrons and are proud to have received commitments from two new major donors pledging six-figure support. We are also grateful to the new supporters joining our giving circles for the Gallery's upcoming *Beatriz González* exhibition and *Encounters: Giacometti x Mona Hatoum*. Additionally, we received a generous major gift made in memory of our former Trustee and long-time supporter, John Murray.

We received further Grant pledges towards the Giacometti series and continue to work with Embassies and Cultural Institutes to support international programming.

Pending applications include proposals towards our public space commissioning series and key learning programmes.

## **WORKING IN LINE WITH OUR VALUES**

### **Sustainability**

Ying Seow has joined the Barbican as the new Head of Sustainability. Ying brings a wealth of experience, having previously led the development of the sustainability strategy for the Restoration and Renewal Programme at the Houses of Parliament. In her new role.

Ying will also work in close partnership with the City of London Corporation's Climate Action Strategy team to deliver impactful energy and carbon reduction initiatives at the Barbican. Current projects include upgrading pumps and ventilation systems for improved energy efficiency and replacing outdated lighting with modern, energy-saving LED systems.

These efforts will mark an important step forward in supporting the City of London's net zero targets and advancing Barbican's role as a sustainable arts venue.

### **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion**

For a full update please see the [most recent EDI Strategy progress report received by PCI subcommittee in June](#). The paper outlined the key progress of the Barbican's EDI Strategy and associated action plans since the full [annual update in January 2025](#). Anti-racism training for all line managers was completed in July. Our next full report and maturity assessment is due in January 2026, where we forecast we will be meeting 29 of the 35 competencies outlined in our strategy, bringing us toward the end of the initial package of work which was outlined to lift the Barbican from crisis point to a relatively confident standing in EDI practice. The most recent report marks two and a half years since the launch of the strategy and although there is certainly more to be done (and further levels of maturity to be met in order to be 'world class'), the overarching headline is that there has been considerable return on investment for this area so far. The main dependency for the delivery of the final stages of the EDI Strategy is now the successful implementation of the upcoming PCI Strategy.

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

Strategic implications – The Barbican Centre 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