

Committee:	Date:
Open Spaces & City Gardens	16 July 2018
Subject: Finsbury Circus Garden – Bandstand Removal	Public
Report of: Director of Open Spaces	For Decision

Summary

There has been a bandstand at Finsbury Circus Garden since 1955, and this feature has been relatively unaffected by Crossrail’s construction work within the garden. As Crossrail’s work nears completion, preparation is underway to reinstate the garden landscape and refreshment building, and concept designs are being prepared.

This report sets out the background to, and evidence for, not including a bandstand within the reinstated landscape at Finsbury Circus. As this conflicts with a previous instruction from your Committee, Members are asked to reconsider their original decision, on the basis of aesthetics, competition for space, cost of maintenance, unfitness for purpose and lack of heritage value.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Agree that the Finsbury Circus bandstand should not be included in the design proposals for the new landscape, but that other locations within and without the Square Mile should be considered before disposal.

Main Report

Background

1. Since 2010, part of Finsbury Circus Garden has been used by Crossrail as a worksite for the construction of the Elizabeth Line. Some garden features that would have sat inside Crossrail’s work compound, such as the listed drinking fountain, were put into storage until they could be reinstated following completion of tunnelling works. Other features, such as the bandstand, sat outside of the hoarding and so were relatively unaffected by the works (N.B. some settlement cracking has occurred across the site, including to the structure of the bandstand, although it is accepted that this should be repaired as part of the outstanding settlement claim from Crossrail).
2. In May 2017, a Gateway 1/2 project report was brought to your Committee for information following project initiation at Projects Sub-Committee in January of that year. The report related to the reinstatement of Finsbury Circus Garden following its use by Crossrail. As part of its exclusions, the report asked

Members to consider the removal of the bandstand from any reinstated scheme, in order to consolidate the overall built footprint within the garden and free up more space for public use.

3. Due to the restrictions of the Gateway report template, it was not possible to fully explore the reasons behind the proposal (this does not form part of that report template), and so it was not possible to fully apprise Members of the significance of the bandstand's removal. Members noted the project proposal report, with the additional caveat that the bandstand should be retained.

Current Position

4. Following the appointment of a design team, concept drawings for both landscape and built elements have been produced, and consultation is taking place with Members to obtain input into the designs as they progress. Officers are now in a position to submit a Gateway 3 outline options appraisal report to Members.

Proposals

5. It is respectfully requested that Members reconsider their original decision to include a bandstand as part of the new landscape design at Finsbury Circus Garden, in light of the following information:
6. **Aesthetics** – with the departure of Crossrail, there is a once in a generation opportunity to install a contemporary, fit-for-purpose landscape that serves the needs of the Future City. A bandstand dating from the mid-1950's may be considered incongruous in such a setting of fine quality materials and planting, especially against the backdrop of a new refreshment pavilion.
7. **Space** – with the completion of the Elizabeth Line and the construction of many iconic office buildings in the nearby Eastern City Cluster, the anticipated increase in the volume of City workers to the Liverpool Street area each day is substantial, and every metre of green space needs to count. The bandstand, with the accompanying hardstanding area to accommodate seating for the audience, eats into that usable space.
8. **Purpose** – It may be that the bandstand once hosted lunchtime concerts on a regular basis, but that evidence is no longer available. Within recent memory, the bandstand hosted approximately four concerts each summer as part of the City of London Festival. Since the Festival ceased to exist, the bandstand has remained unused. Ongoing budget reductions have meant that entertainments have had to be deprioritised in favour of essential maintenance.
9. The new landscape will contain both soft and hard-landscaped areas that can be used for outdoor entertainments such as street theatre, music or temporary sculpture. A recent good example of this is the new garden at nearby Aldgate Square, where the landscape has been designed as a community event space, organised by the City's Culture team.
10. **Unnecessary additional maintenance** – as part of the Operational Property Review, officers have been challenged to justify the need for those buildings and structures that cost money to maintain but are not able to generate any

income to offset that maintenance. Whilst offices and gardeners' welfare accommodation are essential to operational need, other structures, such as the bandstand, are not. Some bandstands in City owned spaces outside the Square Mile do generate a modest income from lettings for events, or have been licensed for weddings, such as Queens Park and West Ham Park. At the latter, the events are predominantly children's parties which is not a market that presents itself in the City. It could also be argued that the new catering facility would provide a much more viable opportunity for wedding hire, with on-site catering facilities and awning.

11. **Heritage value** – despite its Victorian appearance, the bandstand dates from 1955 and so forms part of the 'faux Heritage' palette intended to give the feature the appearance of being part of the historic landscape, whilst in reality providing little if any heritage value. The Garden is a Grade II listed landscape on the Historic England Register. Although the bandstand forms part of the designated asset, it is not listed in its own right and would therefore not require listed building consent for its removal.

Implications

12. Planning Implications – The removal of the bandstand would require Planning Permission, however this would be addressed as part of the wider Planning Application required for the new landscape and refreshment pavilion.
13. Property Implications – If it is decided that the bandstand no longer serves a useful function within the Garden and is able to be removed, that will assist in the reduction of the number of built assets and help towards savings in COL annual property maintenance expenditure.
14. Financial Implications – These have been picked up in the body of the report.
15. Legal implications – s.9 of the City of London (Various Powers) Act 1900 requires Finsbury Gardens to be kept as an open space for recreation and enjoyment of the public. The non-inclusion of the bandstand is compatible with that duty

Conclusion

16. Whilst the bandstand has existed in Finsbury Circus Garden since 1955, this is a relatively recent addition to the garden, constructed in a heritage style. Following the departure of Crossrail, there is an opportunity to create a new and exciting landscape that serves the current needs of our residents, visitors and workers. In retaining the bandstand, there is a risk that this would appear incongruous against the new backdrop, and would not sit comfortably alongside the new refreshment facility, unless that too was designed in the heritage style.

Appendices

- None

Background Papers:

Projects Sub-Committee Report dated 31 January 2017: Finsbury Circus Reinstatement (Gateway 1/2)

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