

Culture Mile Look and Feel Strategy

Response to consultation from Barbican Association February 2018

The BA represents the interests of the 4000 or so residents living on the Barbican Estate, the dense residential area and icon of 20th Century urban planning that lies at the heart of the Culture Mile.

We approach this strategy being very aware of the need to maintain a balance between the cultural activities of the area and the needs of people living in their homes for quiet enjoyment of those homes. Many Barbican residents are supporters and consumers of the cultural activities around them.

Where we make critical comments on this strategy, it is:

1) Where we fear that the balance tips too far towards an unliveable environment where it is difficult for residents to enjoy their homes and bring up their children.

2) The proposals try to obscure the architectural and urban planning features of the estate – features that make the estate itself an important part of the cultural experience.

1. General comments

1.1 We support the need to upgrade the public realm of the area and make it more welcoming.

1.2 We particularly welcome plans to improve Beech Street and the area around Barbican station, including improvements to accessibility at Barbican Station

1.3 We would like to see wayfinding prioritised; we make some detailed suggestions and would be pleased to engage in further consultation on this. See Addendum and Appendix 1

1.4 Upgrading the public realm should include realistic budgets for maintenance.

1.5 We welcome the idea of building on residents' skills and interests in shaping cultural events in the area

1.6 The Barbican residential estate is an urban oasis of huge architectural importance. We were sorry to see this theme relegated in the final strategy. The character of the estate is enshrined in volumes of guidance on the grade II listed buildings and the grade II* listed landscape and is respected by residents. The High Walks and the “fortified” look of the facades are part of that character – designed to shield the interior so it remains a light filled and peaceful oasis - and activities that cut across that character (as some of the suggestions in this strategy do) damage its integrity.

1.7 The Barbican Estate is itself iconic urban planning and a cultural treasure in its own right. Attempts in this strategy to “liven it up”, adorn it with art, public information, or greenery miss the point. It would be much better – and a better use of money – to carefully clean and refurbish areas that look tired or dirty close up (such as the surfaces in utilitarian access areas) while leaving more distant areas (eg the bush hammered concrete) to retain the natural water staining and patina of time. See the

Hayward Gallery for an example of how thorough cleaning and restoring of brutalist materials at eye level can reinvigorate and improve public space without changing it fundamentally.

1.8 We are not in favour of “activation” of streets that people live on and question the practicality of making Silk Street and Moor Lane into “destinations” (action 1.3). The activation is ill defined, it’s not clear how it will be funded, and it risks bringing noise and nuisance to the streets – as opposed to the excellent activities that already exist in the cultural institutions of the area.

1.9 We very much support the activities of the cultural institutions and wish visitors to them to enjoy the works they come to see and enjoy the experience. However, we see no virtue in simply encouraging people to “hang out” purposelessly in the area around the estate. That is inappropriate for a residential area. [We recognise that there are parts of the Culture Mile that are not residential areas and such activity may be appropriate.]

1.10 We welcome the acknowledgement of the need to respect residential amenity and avoid nuisance – in particular in evenings and weekends. However, those sentiments are undermined by some of the proposals:

- eg street “activation” in Silk Street and Moor Lane.
- activities in Lauderdale Place and Cromwell Place
- the proposal for a through route from Barber Surgeon’s Hall through residents’ private gardens or through St Giles’s Terrace to the Arts Centre

1.11 The Barbican is home to a substantial bat population. Bats are protected species and proposals for lighting facades risk destroying their habitat (see comments from the Friends of City Gardens). Bats are particularly numerous around the Barber Surgeons Garden.

1.12 Please note also that the Barbican and St Alphage’s garden are a Site of Borough Importance for Nature Conservation (Grade 2) as set out in the City of London Biodiversity Action Plan 2016 – 2020.

1.13 In several places in the action plan we have added Barbican residents as stakeholders

2. Recommendations and priorities

2.1 Our overall comment on this strategy is for the City to rather less activity than is envisaged in this strategy but to do what it does do better.

So out of all the suggestions, wacky or otherwise, in this document residents would prioritise:

2.2 Implement decent wayfinding (it doesn’t need to involve expensive or bad bits of public art – it just needs to tell people where to go)

2.3 In particular, guide people onto Gilbert Bridge from Wood Street: there are two sets of escalators, two sets of stairs, and one public lift. None are currently adequately signed.

2.4 Do not even think of a new bridge over the lake until you have done the above.

2.5 Several maps hint vaguely at a north-south route through the estate. Be aware that such a route would go through private residential areas that residents pay for, and residents will not want them opened to the public – not least because the design of the estate allows for public access via the High Walks. Not to understand that is to fail to understand some of the unique features of the Barbican’s urban planning.

2.6 Do not obscure the architecture of the Barbican with greenery or mask it with public information displays. Clean the pedestrian areas and in some places use sparingly sensitive lighting to highlight some features of the architecture.

3. Specific comments on the Action Plan

We concentrate on the areas around the Barbican Estate

The numbers within the sections refer to numbered items in that section of the Action Plan

2. Aldersgate Street/Beech Street Junction

We support upgrades 1, 2, 4, 6, 11

3 – We are wary of lighting and public information displays on the Beech Street tunnel bridges. These are facades of the Barbican and we worry that active lighting displays will send the message to visitors that this is a commercial area (encouraging of noise), rather than a residential one

9 – The point about the Barbican’s facades is that they are not soft. They are brutalist – and that is characteristic of the listed estate.

Stakeholders

Add “Barbican Estate residents” “Arts Centre”

3. Beech Street Tunnel

2. The car parks are used to park cars, for baggage stores, and deliveries and for access. They are not very high and not very deep. It’s not clear what they might be used for that will not jeopardise their existing uses.

4. We support improved surfaces and extended pavements (on the south side as well as the north)

7. Enhanced podium access from Lauderdale Place and new public art

We question the need for public art. Anyone walking on to Lauderdale Place immediately sees a dramatic cityscape vista open up. That’s a feast for the eye enough. It does not need to be obscured by a bad sculpture (or even a good one).

8. Enhanced podium access by Murray House. Not clear what this means

4. Golden Lane

6. public space in former loading bay areas behind exhibition halls. This space is overlooked by hundreds of bedrooms. Noisy public space is not welcome

Important considerations

Add Listed status of Golden Lane Estate

5. Aldersgate Street

3. Soundscapes. Please ensure the sound does is not audible in the flats above

3/4. While further green pockets along Aldersgate Street are welcome, the blank facades of the Barbican are part of the estate's architectural character – brutalist, "Barbican". These should be celebrated rather than obscured through greenery, projections of public information, or washes of light.

5. There is no publicly accessible route from Ironmongers Hall to Barber Surgeon's Hall at ground level. There is, of course, an existing High Walk route

Stakeholders

Add Barbican residents

6. Barber Surgeons' gardens

1. St Giles's Terrace is a sensitive area owing to its closeness to Gilbert and Mountjoy Houses. We do not think it is appropriate as a play area. It is well used by visitors and workers as a quiet place during the day to sit. If it becomes an active place, it's a loss to the City of one of its few quiet spaces.

3. Please do not suggest new connections between St Giles and the Barbican terrace

A new connection would:

Breach the guidelines on the Grade II* listed landscape – across one of the most iconic vistas on the whole estate

-be technically challenging (because of different levels and lack of subsoil)

- and therefore very expensive

- be bitterly opposed by residents

- because it would ruin the heart of the listed estate and landscape

- it would introduce noise into the heart of the estate, whereas the current design

ensures that the heart of the estate is a quiet place (eg Gilbert bridge and the High Walks run under the soffits of the buildings and so contain the sound).

If you want an enhanced north-south connection the BA has already suggested a feasible one that would bring minimal disruption to the estate or the architecture in its response to the Barbican Area strategy.

See Appendix 2

This would build on better wayfinding in Wood Street, to direct people onto the Highwalks and over to the arts centre.

Also Improve wayfinding and signage to guide people from St Giles's Terrace up to Gilbert Highwalk and to Arts Centre or Silk Street

Stakeholders

Add Barbican residents

7. Beech Street/ Whitecross Street junction

1. A coffee point in Cromwell Place is a silly idea. There are at least three cafes within 50 yards.

7 We are not sure where the “vacant space around existing car park vents” is – whether it is in Beech Street or Cromwell Place. Residents do not support “activating” Cromwell Place. (Last year's folk singer in a box was unobjectionable because it was small, quiet, patrons were well marshalled by Arts Centre Staff, and it was temporary. A more active use is likely to be noisier and not well marshalled)

8. Silk Street and Moor Lane

Oppose 1. The brutalist facades are part of the architecture; they should not be obscured with greenery. It is possible that some very subtle, low key, lighting might enhance the arches on Silk Street (as on p 31), but this needs to be done sensitively.

2. Decent signage should make Barbican and Guildhall entrances more visible

3. Micro-consolidation centre. How is multiple small vehicles compatible with a pedestrian street? How is it cultural?

4. Any plan to “generate more activity around Milton Court” must recognise that this building is set on a residential street with neighbours in The Heron, Willoughby House and Speed House, whose desire for peace and quiet needs to be respected. Activity within the building may be reasonable, but it can be disturbing if it spills out into the street, especially in the evening.

6. There is an existing City plan to enhance Moor Lane, much consulted on and welcomed by residents.

8. Residents are disappointed to see a proposal to “reclaim” their residential car parks. For Speed House in particular, the car park is the street level access to resident's homes and is important to all of them - particularly those with mobility challenges. Accordingly, we should be grateful if this proposed action is removed from the plan

10 New Union Street is about to become a more intensive rat run for delivery vehicles (complete with reversing bleepers).

11. Or decent signage. Artworks are not the most intuitive ways of telling people where to go

Stakeholders

Add Barbican Residents

9. Future Centre for Music

Stakeholders

Add Barbican Residents

4. Other Comments

On specific pages

p 8. Missing references to SPDs on Management Guidelines to Barbican listed estate and Landscape

p 25.

We support a clear signage system, but be aware that signage on the Barbican estate is subject to the Listed Management Guidelines for the Listed Landscape

We'd like to understand more about use of lighting to control evening activity.

p 28

Silk Street and Moor Lane. We appreciate the acknowledgement that activity on these streets needs to be sympathetic to residents and be focused on the daytime. But be aware that older residents, children, and those who work from home do not want to have disrupted days by activities that are noisier than the background sound.

Note also that, in relation to improved connections to Moorgate, by 2022 the Highwalk Route from Moorgate Station through 121 Moorfields and over the bridge to the Highwalks will once again be available.

Note too that planning applications currently before the Planning committee may have the effect of increasing the number of delivery vehicles in Moor Lane and New Union Street, servicing the commercial buildings on the east side of Moor Lane.

p 30

We welcome the acknowledgement that that light spill and glare lead to significant light pollution and nuisance. We would like the City to take light pollution seriously

Reference to long stretches of blank and inactive frontages on the Barbican Podium. There are very few long frontages on the High Walks – it's mainly pillars, and entrance ways to flats, and the lighting scheme was designed by Chamberlain, Powell, and Bon to be in keeping with a residential area and to highlight the architectural features

p 31

Green spaces. Residents are wary of further lighting on the Barbican podiums (landscape lighting for planters, uplighting for trees, underseat bench lighting, pedestrian path lighting). The lighting is

adequate, and part 2, section 2.2 of the Barbican Listed Management Guidelines Volume IV deals with good practice on lighting and street furniture within the estate

Please also see the comment from Friends of City Gardens about the threat to the bat population

p33. New pedestrian connections. Please be realistic about New Union Street, Barber Surgeons' garden. The first is a narrow run for delivery lorries; the second stops at private gardens

p 34. How is a micro-consolidation centre (which inevitably implies delivery vehicles – even small ones) compatible with a more pleasant pedestrianised environment?

p 42 Please don't smother the textured surfaces of the Barbican with projections and public information. This will obscure the architecture and subject residents to light pollution

p 43 – item 7. The lighting of Defoe House is already designed – by the original architects. Please don't use the façade (which façade?) as a canvas for projection. This will only increase the light pollution that the strategy aims to counter (p 72).

p 44

Café in Cromwell Place. There are several cafes nearby – there's no need for another. Moreover, though there are spare spaces in some Barbican car parks, Cromwell's car park is full.

Alcoves in Lauderdale Place. These are an architectural feature – reflected in the circular planters that sit in front of them. Filling them in will ruin the architecture and is counter to the listed grade II* landscape.

p 46. Who will curate all this activity?

p 47

Play area in Moor Lane. The west side of Moor Lane is entirely residential. Moor Lane is a quiet cycleway and the street will shortly be an access road for delivery vehicles to 121 Moorfields. Moreover, the City has existing plans to widen the pavements and plant more greenery. The City cannot just pile on the number of incompatible things that Moor Lane is expected to sustain.

Also, please be consistent with your recognition of the needs of residents and put play areas for visitors away from residences.

p 48. Soundscapes in Aldersgate Street. Please ensure the sounds cannot be heard in flats

p 50 suggests a structure for a programming group to deliver public art.

This seems not to include the group suggested on p 59 (under community involvement) or residents and local workers. We think it should include that group.

p 59 – We welcome the opportunity for residents to feed in their ideas on the Culture Mile

p 64. Vertical movement. It is completely unclear what is envisaged for the “key points” identified on this page.

P 65.

The yellow line is an ugly blotch of road marking paint that is discontinuous. The role of such a line should be considered as part of a complete wayfinding review. This was promised as part of the Barbican and Golden Lane Area Strategy and residents have always supported such a review as a high priority.

Text No 3. What enhancements do you envisage? The point is there are some marvellous vistas on the estate. How or why do they need enhancing?

p 72

It is BA policy to resist “active frontages” on Silk Street and Moor Lane – because they increase noise and nuisance for residents.

We welcome the suggestions to restrict light pollution.

p 78

Barbican residents will be reassured that their existing privacy and sense of ownership will be maintained if the actions of the City under this strategy don't undermine them. If they do, reassurance is hollow.

Residents already use the podiums. We don't think they need any further encouragement to use them!

We support a proper regime (and budget) for maintenance and repair

p 83 Rightly identifies that the window boxes on residents' balconies add greatly to its charm. It doesn't follow that cladding green walls and greenery to the external facades of the estate will do the same – the areas of planting on the High Walks (eg Beech Gardens) are carefully designed to provide a contrast with the brutalist architecture, and the window boxes are an expression of residents' individual enterprise in their own homes.

Other points

Residents in this corner of the City would like an accessible community space.

Addendum

We have been asked about a Highwalk route to the Arts Centre from the Barbican tube. We support the main access to the Arts Centre running down a much improved Beech Street. However, we recognise that some people will want an alternative route.

We suggest the following route, which runs largely under the soffit of Defoe House and so does not disturb residents above and runs on the north side of Defoe House and so does not go over the roofs of the below-podium flats in Defoe House:

The goes route up the stairs from the tube, over the bridge over Aldersgate Street, across the upper podium to the stairs at Defoe place that lead down to the lower Podium, and then carries on under the northern soffit of Defoe House. People can then either go down the steps to the Lakeside Terrace or turn left into Frobisher Crescent. If the Arts Centre opened its gallery entrance they could go straight on into the Arts Centre at the level of the art gallery. The Arts Centre could also improve its signage for people turning into Frobisher Crescent to reach the level 2 entrance on the Library Floor.

In addition, we commend the existing north-south route across the estate at High Walk level that starts at Wood Street. It goes up to the Highwalk via any of the following in Wood Street: two sets of escalators, one ramp, one lift, and two sets of stairs plus another public lift at St Giles's Terrace.

It then continues on to Gilbert Bridge to the Arts Centre and then either

- down the staircase to Silk Street, or
- on round Frobisher Crescent to Defoe Place and Aldersgate Street or
- turn right past the Dorothy Annan murals and under Speed House and towards Moorgate

We do not understand why this route is not signposted well – and have been saying so for years! (one reason why we keep emphasising wayfinding)

Appendix 1

Extract from BA response to Barbican and Golden Lane Area Strategy on Wayfinding

“1. We strongly support the creation of a way finding and signage review and strategy and would give it the highest priority. Done well and sensitively, a way finding strategy that includes the wider area (including stations) and the cultural institutions themselves could go a considerable way to solving some of the other problems at considerably less cost.”

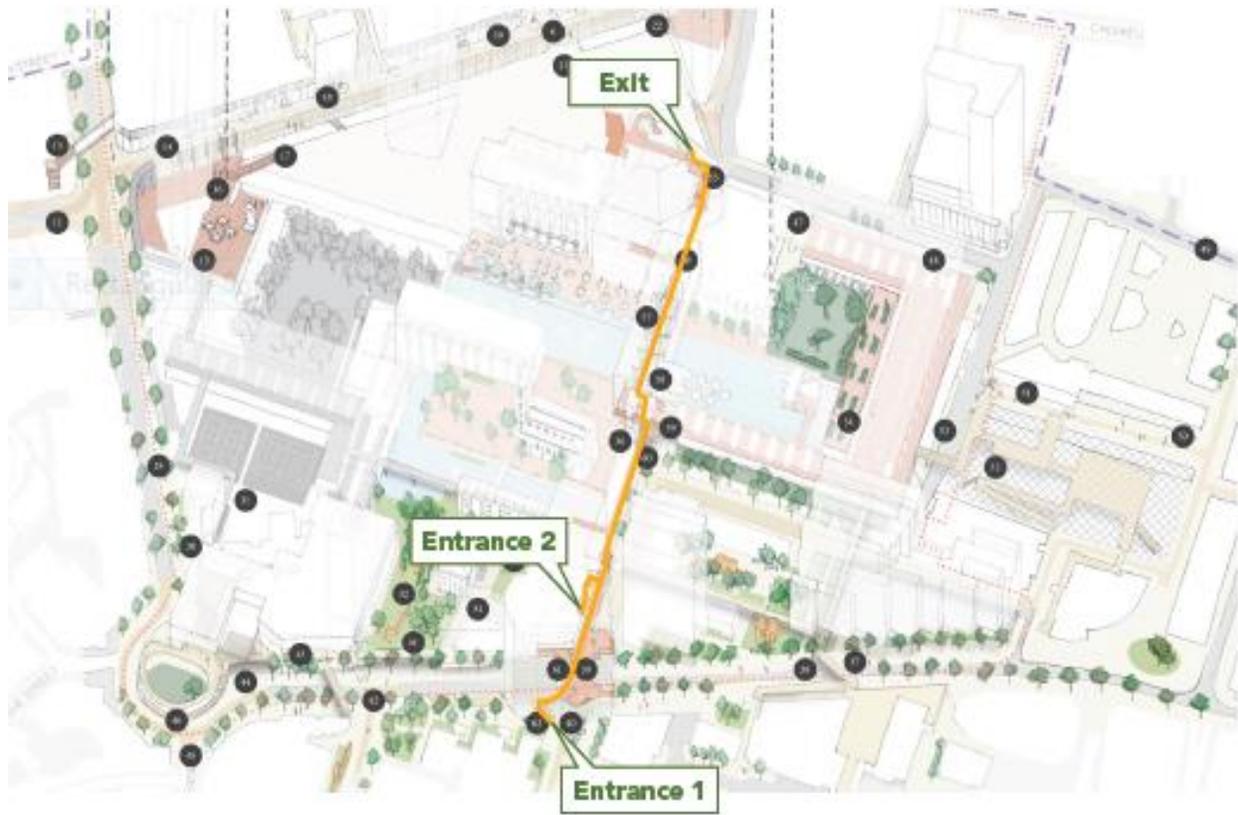
“6. Residents believe that it is impossible to channel all visitors on a restricted set of routes and that it is advantageous to residents that a mixture of routes at ground level on the boundaries of the estate and at Highwalk level through the estate distribute pedestrians around the area and to the cultural institutions. The way finding strategy should support that.”

Appendix 2

Extract from BA response to Barbican and Golden Lane Area Strategy on an improved North South route through the estate

“3. Residents are not convinced of the need for a new North-South route through the estate, and it does threaten residential amenity. But if it is thought necessary, we offer an alternative proposal that would avoid much of the nuisance and cost of the other suggestions together with being a simpler and more direct route. It would also operate on public highway and avoid going through the Arts Centre and hence be available at all times.

The route would take pedestrians up onto the Highwalk at 125 London Wall via one of the two sets of escalators on Wood Street (or the two sets of stairs, the lift, and the ramp). It would continue north over Gilbert Bridge and from there continue in a straight line to the edge of the Highwalk, where it would drop down to Silk Street via a new lift and stair case immediately south of the Arts Centre’s main entrance.



In addition, we point out that when London Wall Place is complete there will be an attractive south-north route at ground level. This will lead up from Cheapside and the Guildhall, cross London Wall, go past St Alphage Church and the garden at London Wall Place into Fore Street, then Moor Lane, and into Silk Street or on to Chiswell Street. Much of this would be a green and pleasant route.

This is in addition to the Highwalk route that will also become available from the bridge over London Wall, through the London Wall Place Highwalk to the bridge over Fore Street and onto the Barbican Highwalk.