

Barbican Association

Report of the Annual General Meeting held on 14 April 2022 at the City of London School for Girls

Speakers

Deputy Christopher Hayward was the guest speaker at this year's AGM, which was hosted by Adam Hogg, the Barbican Association Chair, who also spoke on the work of the Association. Deputy Hayward spoke about the Lisvane review of the City's internal governance and also responded to questions on other matters.

The Lisvane report

This report was commissioned from Lord Lisvane, a former Clerk to the House of Commons, and reflected the concern of elected members that the Corporation's internal organisation was unsatisfactory. With 145 committees, sub-committees and working parties, there was a lack of clarity about decision-making which was slow and complex.

The report, which was published in September 2020, made 100 recommendations. Unlike other local authorities which operate with a Cabinet-style organisation, the Corporation was governed by members and Christopher Hayward led work with the 125 (mainly independent) members of the Court of Common Council to reach agreement on as many areas as possible. Some 22 meetings were held to consider the report's recommendations: these were mainly with members, but also involved other bodies responsible for schools, culture and open spaces.

New arrangements had been put in place to deal with two underlying concerns:

The standards régime had lost credibility and trust, and a new process dealing with members and standards was introduced in early 2021, with the Court of Common Council now overseen by an independent panel.

The competitiveness of the City of London's financial and professional services was now the focus of a new Advisory Body which was leading a new competitiveness strategy.

Other achievements with the Lisvane recommendations so far include a 40% reduction in the number of committees (from 145 to 80, including some that are time-limited), and more delegation to officers. An internal staffing review – TOM (the Total Operational Model) – has also been taking place.

Barbican residents will wish to note that agreement has been reached in principle to replace a number of existing committees with a new Housing Committee. The Court of Common Council wished the proposals to be developed and finalised in consultation with residents, with the work due to take place after the recent local elections. There was general agreement that the current Residents' Consultation Committee does not work well.

The current arrangements would remain for a few months longer to allow new arrangements to be developed. It was intended to draw on residents' knowledge to ensure that the new proposals deliver what is required – for Golden Lane, Middlesex Street and estates outside the City, as well as for the Barbican. There is an awareness among members of the disquiet felt by residents about their relationship with the Corporation.

Questions to Deputy Hayward

[Question 1] The speaker was asked for a commitment to maintain the Residents' Consultation Committee and to make it more influential. *Deputy Hayward said that he could give a personal commitment, but a decision about the Committee's future would depend on other Common Councillors.*

[Question 2] A concern about the Corporation's commitment to openness and transparency was raised in the context of freemasonry. For example, declarations by members (prior to the recent elections) showed that the Policy and Resources Committee and Property Investment Board each had more freemasons as members than residential councillors. *Deputy Hayward acknowledged that he was a freemason, but indicated that he had never been lobbied by other freemasons in his work as a member of the Corporation. Councillors were obliged to declare their membership of external bodies: 40 members of the last Court of Common Council were freemasons. He felt that banning freemasons would be the start of a rocky road to banning other organisations too. Committee membership was open to all councillors: Ward committees were nominated by each ward, and there was also nothing to stop residential councillors becoming members of the Policy and Resources Committee or Property Investment Board.*

[Question 3] Many committees do not have residential councillors as members, but all City decision-making should take account of residents' votes. *The City franchise was unique and should be an opportunity to prove that business and residents can live in harmony. Business rates, for example, supported services to residents. The City arrangement was preferable to the party-political system used in most local authorities.*

[Question 4] Did the Lisvane review look at the business franchise? *The review considered only internal governance. Deputy Hayward was open to a debate about*

the franchise, although any change would require a convincing alternative to be presented to government.

[Question 5] The recent election results had demonstrated residents' lack of confidence in the Corporation, with the balance of business and residents' voices out of kilter. This was exemplified in the development of London Wall West, where the first phase of consultation had ignored residents' views. The relationship between the Barbican Estate Office and residents was a second example. This did not feel like a relationship between those who supply services and those who pay for them. *Deputy Hayward recognised the anger and frustration felt by residents. The process of consultation did not operate as effectively as it had some years ago: discussions were often left too late to influence decisions, and there was a reluctance to tell residents the truth, even if it was uncomfortable.*

Barbican Association: Update on the year's work

Adam Hogg, the Barbican Association Chair, introduced his review of the year's work with a reminder of the foresight shown by the Corporation in the 1950s and 1960s in creating the Barbican Estate. This extraordinary combination of residential accommodation, schools and arts centre was probably the finest example of post-war development in Europe and was home to half of the residents of the Square Mile.

Residents considered themselves, along with the City, as Guardians of the Estate, and were distressed by its current state – the lack of maintenance and expenditure being all too apparent.

The Barbican Association, even though it represented more than 50% of flats on the Estate, was keen to attract new members. It would also welcome new additions to its General Council rather than having to rely on the same individuals filling the vacancies.

The Association's response to the Lisvane report emphasised three points: Those who paid service charges should exert more control over how money was spent. There needed to be a strategic group, including residents and other occupiers, charged with looking after the Barbican Estate as a whole. The Corporation needed to pay more attention to the needs of residents.

The recent local elections were the focus of an Election Special – the January edition of the Barbican Association Newsletter – which was followed by hustings for prospective candidates for Aldersgate and Cripplegate wards which were held in St Giles' Church. The outcome was that 11 of the 15 Common Councillors were newly elected, and all agreed to work together with the Barbican Association on matters of common interest.

There has been some progress with the Association's lobbying on how the Estate might contribute towards work on climate change: the Corporation has funded a study on underfloor heating to see how improved insulation, ventilation and controls could improve energy use by residents.

The Barbican Association website had been redesigned, and further work was required to improve communication with members, for example, by extending the use of emails and by making it easier for members to get in touch.

The website hosted an Anti-Social Behaviour reporting tool, which allowed residents to log incidents around the estate. New signage had been put in place – after a protracted delay – and the reporting tool had almost completed a year of data collection. The statistics would be provided to the Corporation so that additional measures to control anti-social behaviour could be considered.

Planning developments were monitored by a small Barbican Association group, who check planning applications and talk to planning officers. It was felt that the City Plan 2035 tried to be all things to all people, with little to control development or provide amenities for residents. This Plan was now being revised, with a new date of 2040. A number of areas were being reviewed: tall buildings, climate change, the requirement for office space post-pandemic, the role of retail, housing, and inclusivity.

The Arts Centre had approached the Barbican Association for comments on its renewal programme. It was considered that the Centre was broadly doing the right things, but the building needed repairs and restoring. The group working on the redesign will be briefed on the residents' perspective (the prospectus for this work did not mention residents).

The Beech Street traffic experiment was under review by the Corporation. It was difficult to develop a single Barbican Association view, since the experiment affected the various parts of the Estate in different ways. It was hoped to reach a conclusion that goes some way to satisfy everyone.

The Service Charges Working Party had been pursuing the issue of the Concierges/Car Park Attendants, following the Corporation's proposals to reduce the number of staff last year. An announcement was expected soon which should confirm that no changes would be made to the current service and no extra charges would be levied.

Residents' feedback on the initial proposals for the London Wall West site were ignored by the Project Team, and an Open Meeting was arranged by the Barbican Association in March. It looked as if the planning application for the final proposals for the site would be made in the autumn 2022, and the Association will continue to

press for the Corporation to re-think the use of the site, given the impact of both the pandemic and climate change. The Barbican Association is taking expert advice to mount a campaign acknowledging the importance of the site to London, and challenging the size and scale of the proposed buildings.

Looking forward, the Association's priorities would be to work closely with our elected representatives; to improve our communications with residents; to increase our membership; and to engage with the City Corporation in a constructive manner in our role as Guardian of the Barbican Estate.

Questions to Adam Hogg and Deputy Hayward

[Question 6] Attracting new members to the Barbican Association requires an approach that engages them in two-way discussion. The website pushes information to members; town hall meetings engage them in discussion.

[Question 7] Talking to people around the Estate, and a Barbican Association badge, would also attract members.

[Question 8] Is there a changing view in the City Corporation that it is better to redevelop buildings rather than build new? Will the new Planning and Transportation Committee (after the recent elections) have a different view? *There is likely to be a shift in emphasis but there are no results yet.*

[Question 9] The Barbican Association had asked for a copy of the report dealing with the case for retaining Bastion House and the existing Museum of London buildings, but this had not been supplied, even in response to a Freedom of Information request. *Deputy Hayward thought that the request was fair and reasonable. He would investigate with the planning officers and respond.* It was suggested that a redacted version, at least, should be provided.

[Question 10] Buildings and gardens on the Golden Lane Estate were looking very neglected. It was evident that they required a great deal of money and attention. *Deputy Hayward agreed that progress was too slow and would ask officers what needed to be done to speed things up.*

[Question 11] The Project Team had indicated to Barbican Association representatives that their objectives with the designs for London Wall West were to maximise the income from the site, and to build as high as possible. *Deputy Hayward said that he was very unhappy that the project had been characterised in this way and he would investigate. He acknowledged that income from the site was necessary to fund the Museum of London. He expected a proposal to be considered by the Planning and Transportation Committee in February or March 2023. His understanding was that the proposed buildings were no higher than the existing*

building on the site, and he had been assured that the proposals were policy compliant. He would discuss the building designs to see whether some 'thinning down' would be possible to reduce the massing.

[Question 12] It was pointed out that Building 1 in the proposals would replace Bastion House. It would be 17 storeys high and 2.5 times the footprint of the existing building. Building 2 would be 14 storeys high. Building 3 would be five storeys. No member of the project team had looked at the proposals from the perspective of Thomas More House. *Deputy Hayward accepted an invitation to visit the flat of a leaseholder present at the meeting to gain this perspective.*

[Question 13] Proposals for the redevelopment of 1 Golden Lane were now available on the Corporation website. It was evident that these would add to the height and bulk of the building and that the new building would overshadow a large proportion of Ben Johnson House.

[Question 14] The Museum of London would be closing at the end of the year, but Smithfield traders had not yet agreed to the move of the market. *Deputy Hayward indicated that the Museum of London would go dark in December. The traders had agreed terms in principle for the move of the market which would happen in one move, rather than two.*

Treasurer's report

Copies of the audited accounts for the year ended 31 December 2021 were available at the meeting and showed an accumulated balance of £205,520. The Chair emphasised that the funds were for the benefit of the Association and would continue to be managed with great care. The accounts were approved. The work of the Honorary Treasurer, Tony Swanson, and the Honorary Independent Examiner, Antony Croot, was acknowledged with thanks and appreciation.

Barbican Association General Council

Seven candidates had been proposed for nine places, and the following were elected unopposed: Randall Anderson, David Bradshaw, Adam Hogg, Helen Hudson, Ted Reilly, Jane Smith and Sandy Wilson.

Introduction of Common Councillors

The Chair introduced the newly elected representatives for the Aldersgate and Cripplegate wards.

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