



ASSOCIATION

# GOLDEN LANE ESTATE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Representing the interests of Barbican Residents



## OPEN LETTER TO THE CORPORATION OF LONDON

06/04/2021

*Following the scrapping of the Centre for Music, the Barbican Association and the Golden Lane Estate Residents' Association call on the City of London to produce a comprehensive "Blueprint" for the Barbican and Golden Lane rather than allowing piecemeal over-commercialisation of the area.*

Dear Corporation of London,

During, and immediately after, the devastation of the Second World War, the City of London showed real leadership and imagination by developing a comprehensive plan for a mixed residential, cultural, and educational district in the west of the Square Mile.

Fifty years on from the Golden Lane and the Barbican estates welcoming their first residents, the time is now right for a similar exercise to ensure that this internationally acclaimed neighbourhood and asset<sup>1</sup> in the heart of the City is not slowly stripped of its current and future value by incremental planning mistakes and limited future vision.

The scrapping of plans for the Centre for Music on the Museum of London/Bastion House site opens opportunities for a plan with widespread and long-lasting benefits. Instead of separate, and often competing, projects for parts of the neighbourhood we invite you to engage with the wider community to produce a cohesive post-Covid *Blueprint* for the whole Barbican and Golden Lane neighbourhood<sup>ii</sup>.

We note that, with a disjointed approach to separate projects, over £8m has been spent on abandoned plans for the Centre for Music and the futile attempt to expand the City of London School for Girls<sup>iii</sup>. Neither had proper community involvement, nor a sustainable business case.

We now fear that the pendulum will swing back from schemes needing extravagant funding towards a drive for over-commercialisation of the area, piece-by-piece<sup>iv</sup>. If applied to the Museum of London/Bastion House site, and others like it, the inevitable result will be poor outcomes for this very special part of the City.

In the meantime, the sheer range of potential in such an internationally significant district demands a properly constructed and coordinated approach<sup>v</sup>. The opportunities include:

- the soon to be vacated Museum of London/Bastion House<sup>vi</sup> site which is suitable for a wide range of beneficial uses to the City, its residents and workers, and to London as a whole;
- plans to invest in the Arts Centre to make it fit for the next 40 years;
- the Barbican Exhibition Halls - an under-used resource for which the Corporation of London has no clear or published plan;
- the pilot, zero-emission scheme<sup>vii</sup> under the Beech Street tunnel tests a more climate-conscious approach in the City, but no long-term strategy has been disclosed or consulted on;
- sustainable gardens on the public Highwalk<sup>viii</sup> and the Barbican Wildlife Garden illustrate how high-quality, green, open spaces are vital, but no City resources are dedicated to expanding this provision<sup>ix</sup>;
- the move of the Museum of London offers the potential to develop culture in the City, but this will not happen without a clear strategy;
- the redevelopment of Smithfield Market when the traders move out cannot just be planned behind closed doors by a small group of interests and commercial developers;
- the arrival of Crossrail, bringing a predicted 206,000<sup>x</sup> daily visitors to the area, should be met by improvements in the walking environment locally; and
- having celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries<sup>xi</sup> of both the Golden Lane and Barbican Estates recently there is now an opportunity to build on the success of this

extraordinary internationally acclaimed neighbourhood by creating an equally imaginative and bold vision for the next 50 years.

The neighbourhood is internationally recognized because it has successfully and sustainably integrated community, commerce and culture over five decades; there is simply nothing like it anywhere else in the world. We are committed to finding ways to put this unique neighbourhood to the best possible use for the future while maintaining liveability and community at its core – a tranquil counterpoint to the monoculture of office and retail that is the surrounding City.

The Barbican Association and Golden Lane Estates Residents' Association call on the Corporation of London to establish a detailed comprehensive *Blueprint* based on the following principles;

- Open exploration of the options in a way that is, crucially, genuinely participatory, integrating all the relevant interests to create a more robust outcome than current piecemeal plans;
- Putting climate change at the heart of the decision-making;
- Extending the provision of easily accessible open space and greening the City as a priority;
- Recognizing that diversity of uses, including a growing residential population, is crucial for the long-term health of the City as a whole;
- Prioritising peace and tranquillity for the health of workers and residents alike, especially in the post-Covid decade ahead;
- Maximising the opportunities for creativity and imagination<sup>xii</sup>; and
- Establishing a City of London governance framework which encourages positive collaboration and co-creation, rather than competition, between all the institutions and communities in the area.

Barbican Association Chair, Adam Hogg and Tim Godsmark of GLERA said “given the international significance of the Barbican and Golden Lane, and its commercial and cultural contribution, the City needs to bring together all the different interest groups in an inclusive, forward-looking process to create a proper *Blueprint*; not just a jigsaw of unconnected, and often competing and wasteful, initiatives”.

Yours faithfully,



Adam Hogg  
Chair, Barbican Association



Tim Godsmark  
Chair, Golden Lane Residents Association



*Bastion House and the Museum of London, 2021*

## NOTES FOR EDITORS

<sup>i</sup> The Barbican complex became Grade II listed on 5 September 2001. It has since been designated a site of special architectural interest for its scale, its cohesion, and the ambition of the project. According to the Corporation of London, listing “ensures care will be taken over decisions affecting its future and any alterations respect the particular character and interest of the building”.

<sup>ii</sup> The Corporation consulted on a Barbican and Golden Lane Area Strategy in 2013-15. Several related strands of work have since been started – but the strategy itself has not been reviewed and parts of it are now materially out of date.

<sup>iii</sup> £15.3m was set aside for the City of London Girls School to fund an extension, without first developing a strategy or a sufficiently detailed business plan for repaying the proposed investment. In December 2019 the scheme was scrapped, but not after considerable resources were spent on architectural plans of questionable value. £8.05m has been spent to date on the Centre for Music, before this £288 million scheme was also scrapped in February 2021 after the failure to produce a business case to justify the projected expenses of building and running the Centre.

<sup>iv</sup> The Corporation of London has 6 committees, 14 sub-committees and one consultative committee, all with separate, compartmentalised interests in the Barbican and Golden Lane Estates, and with multiple sources of financing.

<sup>v</sup> The City has a Chief Surveyor, responsible for maximising commercial return on City land, but no Chief Strategist responsible for long-term sustainability and design of the local economy and environment nor a Chief Urbanist developing guidelines and vision for the urban fabric of the City. In contrast Copenhagen employs a City Architect with a remit to promote and balance the public realm, environment, economy, quality of life and wellbeing and Glasgow City Council employs a City Urbanist to develop ‘place quality’ working on housing, business, environment, transport and place connectivity and liveability.

<sup>vi</sup> In 2019, the Corporation sought and was granted a Certificate of Immunity for the Museum of London and Bastion House. This means that the buildings, unlike the rest of the Barbican estate, are barred from becoming Listed Buildings for five years – until August 2024. A similar Certificate of Immunity was granted to Milton Court (thereby allowing it to be demolished and replaced with the Heron) against English Heritage’s recommendation, and despite its architect, Geoffry Powell, viewing it as his favourite work. <https://c20society.org.uk/lost-modern/milton-court-barbican-london>

<sup>vii</sup> Although the Corporation’s Transport Strategy says that the ZEZ will be developed “in consultation with residents and businesses”, in December 2019 the Corporation chose to start the Beech Street pilot without prior consultation.

<sup>viii</sup> Created by Professor Nigel Dunnett.

<sup>ix</sup> In recent years the City has favoured a policy of allowing development on open space and favouring the creation of roof gardens to compensate for the loss of amenity at pavement level. These gardens in the sky are less accessible, less visible and have less of an impact on ground-level pollution than the open space they replace. Ground level open space in the City is under pressure from the plans to increase commercial floor space in the City by 50 percent, from 1.2 million square metres to 1.8 million in 2026.

<sup>x</sup> Crossrail’s website estimates 82,000 passengers each day at Farringdon and 124,000 at Liverpool Street with 24 trains per hour at peak periods. These stations bookend the Barbican estate and are the only Crossrail stations in the City. Farringdon station has now been handed over to TfL ahead of services starting in 2022.

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<sup>xi</sup> Architectural historians, residents, planners, commentators came together on 8 June 2019 at a 50th anniversary seminar organised by the Barbican Association in partnership with the Barbican Arts Centre to celebrate and talk about the Estate’s history, its present, and what its future might be. Historian Otto Saumarez-Smith spoke of how the Barbican developed ideas first explored in the Golden Lane Estate: the Barbican was characterised by clarity of form, robustness and vigour. “These were not isolated buildings but a theatrical townscape with multiple interlocking levels.” One of the original architects, Frank Woods, agreed “The Barbican is not a building – it’s a neighbourhood”. Architect John Allan, who wrote the listed management guidelines, argued that the guidelines helped reconcile the tension between legal ownership and cultural ownership and helped bring intergenerational equity. “The Barbican embodies civic valour, urbanity. Its spacious generosity should not be appropriated by infilling or monetising its space. It’s a complete urban environment and needs understanding and vigilance”.

<sup>xii</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic has required all cities to reimagine their strategies and plans, including their aspirations for cultural and creative development. In this context we welcome rebalancing the relationship between culture and commerce in the Square Mile proposed in the recent Fuelling Creative Renewal report, recognising creativity as a vital force, and look forward to the City incorporating it in post-pandemic recovery plans.