

Consultation Summary, September 2022 Barbican Podium Phase 2

1: Executive Summary:

The final stage of the consultation was launched when e-mail invitations to attend webinars were sent to the email updates list, community stakeholders and local councillors. Adverts were also placed in City Matters and EC1 Echo and posters were placed in the Barbican Library and Golden Lane Community Centre. The consultation was also advertised through the Barbican residents' bulletin and City of London twitter.

The webinars were a good way to share the latest plans for the Barbican Podium Phase 2 ahead of the application for planning and listed building consent being submitted.

Two webinars were held on 17th August and 12th September. Several emails with feedback were also received.

Comm Comm UK, on behalf of the City of London Corporation (the City Corporation), has summarised feedback received from q&a sessions and emails during this period.

2: Key Figures:

- 88 people attended the August webinar
- 54 questions asked or comments made during the August webinar
- 18 people attended the September webinar
- 20 questions asked or comments made during the September webinar
- 1001 people visited the project website www.barbicanprojects.coco.uk in August and September (up to 23rd September 2022)

3: Approach to consultation

The webinars took place on Wednesday 17th August 2022 from 7pm to 8pm and Monday 12 September 2022 from 7pm to 8pm.

The panellists from our project team included:

- Michael Gwyther-Jones, Head of New Developments and Special Projects, City of London Corporation
- Dean Elsworth, Project Manager, City of London Corporation
- Neil Manthorpe, Landscape Architect, Atkins Global
- Helen Davinson, Resident Services Manager for Barbican Estate Office
- Sandra Brown, Senior Communications Officer, New Developments and Special Projects, City of London Corporation
- Nigel Dunnett, Professor of Planting Design, Urban Horticulture, and Vegetation Technology, University of Sheffield
- Jessica Stewart, Comm Comm UK
- Tamsin Hartin, Comm Comm UK

Neil took attendees through a presentation, including a video 'fly-through' of the proposed design which was followed by a Q&A session.

4: Webinar Q&A summary

The following summary outlines the questions asked, and answers given during both webinars. It also includes questions asked that the team didn't have time to answer on 17 August, plus other questions asked via email. It also notes any feedback statements given.

Planting

Q: Will the new planting be drought resistant? /The phase 1 grass edgings have suffered in recent hot weather.

A: One of the guiding principles of the project is that the planting must be tolerant and resilient and to minimise water to be as sustainable and climate change adapted as possible. The phase one plantings were in some ways ahead of their time in being designed to be tolerant of really dry conditions and although this summer has been extreme, the planting was developed to deal with these sorts of conditions and that will certainly be the case for phase two.

Q: What types of trees might you plant that would protect light into first floor balcony windows and flats?

A: We are likely looking at multi stem trees or medium sized trees with many seasons of interest. Crab-apples, for example, flowering trees, fruiting trees because biodiversity and food for other creatures is important. In general, the canopy will be light and dappled rather than heavy and dense.

Q: How are you dealing with the wind tunnel effect along the podium?

A: We have carried out micro-climate analysis which shows that the way to overcome this is larger blocks of planting which is designed to impact wind flow. This will be tested in the developed design.

Q: How will you deal with the leaf fall in Autumn?

A: The Woodland Edge concept involves leaf fall - we are working with a more natural system here, creating something which is a more like a functioning woodland, so the leaf fall is an important part of that natural cycle. This will come into discussions about the maintenance of the scheme to make sure that it works, particularly in the open spaces and paved areas.

Q: Why no living walls?

A: The focus of this project originally is about the waterproofing membrane, which is along the ground on the podium level and the reason for carrying out the works is to replace that. Also there are already some living walls near St Alphage on the other side of the Barbican and they are very dependent on irrigation and expensive to maintain.

Q: In phase one Nigel Dunnett planted too many grasses - is he going to change this approach?

A: One of the things that is very successful about Nigel's scheme is the lower amount of watering with the drought tolerant species used (see answers above/below). In extreme dry weather like we've just had this summer, the plants will brown, but they will survive and allow for all year-round colour and interest.

However, there will be some changes made to the planting, phase two won't just be a replication of what happened in phase one. The areas to the north of Ben Johnson house and adjacent to Frobisher Crescent will have more traditional types of planting whilst the areas through the main vista will be more akin to what you've got in phase one. We have learnt lessons from phase one in some of the species' selection and have had meetings with the City of London Open Spaces Team that will be responsible for managing and maintaining it.

Q: *St Alphage gardens is very successful development, have you taken any lessons on board?*

A: Yes, we know the development and agree it is a very successful and attractive part of the Barbican. The only comments that we've had back from our Open Spaces Team advisors is that some elements of St Alphage gardens, particularly the green walls, are heavily dependent on irrigation and expensive to maintain.

Q: *How will you ensure we do not get the 'symphony in yellow' of parched grasses (irrespective of weather conditions/seasons) in almost monoculture form across some of the Phase 1 Beech Gardens planting? We've also seen how labour intensive it is, and how much watering it has required.*

A: Nigel explained how this is a chance to show leadership in how we develop our landscapes and public realm into the future in the challenging situations we face. The Barbican has always been in the forefront of ideas, and this should be the case with this landscape. As we move into a future where we have to work with climate change, reduced water and scarce resources we have to think about our landscapes and public gardens a little bit differently. Part of that change is to move away from pristine, lush greenness 365 days a year. We do need to have to have a backup plan for making sure that the landscape survives really extreme conditions and that is part of the built-in process that we're working through with the planting, and part of the discussions we will have over the maintenance that will be required to sustain a really high-quality landscape into the future.

Other feedback:

- Love the woodland edge concept.
- The soft landscaping planting, existing and proposed, including the woodland edge concept, is just brilliant - congratulations!
- The long grasses are so much more attractive than the present cut grass approach
- The greening ideas look terrific

Drainage

Q: *Will drainage water be recycled back to the surface?*

A: There will be some provision for some water storage, water harvesting and attenuation underneath some of those planting areas.

Q: *Will the underground drainage system (which is out of your scope) be tested and not assumed to be problematic and ruin the whole project?*

A: As outlined in the presentation we have carried out surveys on all the down pipes within the Barbican podium. We have also surveyed the route down to the actual sewage system. We haven't surveyed the sewers themselves as these are the city-wide London sewers.

Q: What was the result of the drain survey/tests? There is a lot of pooling on Ben Jonson Place and Cromwell High Walk this evening.

A: We knew there was an issue but have been surprised at how many of these downpipes are blocked. This is a big issue that needs to be resolved and that's why we've sampled the down pipes so that we can understand these issues. A lot of the difficulties are around access because these pipes aren't sitting out on the side of the building, they're running through all sorts of different rooms. We know it will be a challenge getting these repaired but have come up with the resolution for about 80% of them. There are some more complicated ones that we are still looking at in more detail, which may need rerouting or closing off entirely.

Q: What's the plan to rectify the damage in phase 1 (pooling of water, leaching) and ensure this isn't repeated?

A: We were aware from early days that what wasn't included in the Phase one works was an assessment of the current drainage there. That was one of our key surveys that we undertook right from the start of the scheme survey of Phase two. Knowing that whatever we did at the surface was dependent on the condition the drainage was in. Ultimately, we must get the water off the surface of the podium as quickly as possible and into the drainage system. We have now also carried out a sample survey of the drainage to phase one with similar findings to that that we found in Phase two and is proposed that the Phase one drainage remedial works is brought into scope for the Phase two project.

Q: What stops the new downpipes from getting blocked too? Is it maintenance after this phase is completed? And has that maintenance been included in the expected ongoing costs?

A: It's the management and maintenance of these down pipes. They were built in the 1970s and have remained unchecked. This is critical to the future success of the drainage at the podium.

Anti-social behaviour

Q: The new design appears to address ASBs Parkour and Skateboarding but the removal of steps and opening up the through routes can be expected to exacerbate the ASB of cycling. Please consider designing the landscaping to, at least, deflect direct through routes to attempt to reduce occurrences of cycling or consider other design techniques you may have used successfully in other projects.

A: We have tried to balance the requirements of the Grade II Listed Registered Parks & Gardens guidance against some of the issues faced. Historic England, and the 20th Century Society in particular, wanted this clear open vista through the main promenade. There are some strong arguments and views for that being the case, particularly with the openness and the clear legibility and sightlines and access issues that were resolved.

When looking at the issues of the cycling across the podium, even if we went back to the scheme we had before with planted areas in between, cyclists could still weave through there. This is a wider management issue for the Barbican itself and perhaps looking at control points at the top of the ramps would be another thing that we could look at as part of this project.

Q: From what I can see, there is insufficient planting around the vents by Frobisher Crescent to deter the parkour groups. They will trample the plants to make a path as I've witnessed already.

A: This is an issue that we are aware of and something where we're trying to use the planting to deter the use of. Unfortunately, no matter what level of planting you put around there, the risk is they know how to use that to climb up and get higher up, or if it isn't the right type, it gets trampled on. But we have put that in as a deterrent to try to restrict access towards them, but also to sort of frame them as the architectural feature that they are. We are aware that the landscape alone won't stop such ASB, but it can help as a part of a wider programme to deter their use.

Q: Have we got any specific plants that are good for deterring parkour? Spiky plants, for instance?

A: I'm not sure about putting spiky and dangerous plants in. We will take this feedback, and we'll look carefully at what we do here when we come to do the detailed work with the plants.

Q: We have parkouring and skateboarding on the tiled long seats on the Highwalk. Would this new seating be different? / Terraces seem to be ideal for skateboarders.

A: The intention from a heritage perspective will be to respect the original designs in other parts of the high walk. What will be slightly different is they will be curved in a similar way to phase one. And we're also looking at how we can integrate skateboarding deterrents within them and to alleviate some of those problems.

Q: Can the grating on top of the vents between Frobisher and Ben Jonson House be lowered significantly to make it less attractive for parkour? Similar to the vents above the carpark in Golden Lane

A: We will review this.

Q: How does one improve access for all, while also eliminating antisocial cycling and skateboarding?

A: It can be a conflict but what we've tried to do is look where the synergies are. One of the main ones is the elimination of as many steps as possible which removes jumps and improves accessibility. The sight lines will be important – when things are overlooked, you get a sort of natural surveillance of spaces as well.

Water Features/Dolphin Statue

Q: Is the water feature going? Where will the dolphin fountain go?

A: The water feature on the northern side of Ben Johnson House will be retained in a very similar form to where it is at the moment. The dolphin sculpture itself will be retained and there are a couple of options as to where that could go back and whether it will have water. This will form part of the brief for the art strategy so isn't decided yet.

Q: I am wondering whether all water features have to be chlorinated. Could a water feature that does not need chlorination be left where the dolphins are now?

A: Amenity water fountains tend to have treated water to stop them blocking and greening. We have identified some areas to introduce ephemeral landscapes within the podium. These will be wet in the winter and dry in the summer month. We will explore the positioning of the dolphins within these areas with the artists.

Public Art Strategy

Q: Do we need to have new sculptures or is this a waste of time and money?

A: We have an obligation from planning that we must make provision for a public artwork within the scheme. As mentioned in the presentation, we have employed Future City as an artwork consultant. There's a stringent process of engagement for the procurement of the artwork, all under the supervision of the artwork specialist consultant. There will be a steering group with representation from various stakeholders and residents so that we have a wide viewpoint in terms of the procurement of the artwork. The ambition is that we will provide artwork of a high quality and of a high interest that responds to the character of the Barbican and the themes of the new podium landscape. The artwork will encourage people to visit, learn, play and interact and will be designed to appeal to the diverse communities in the area.

Q: How do we join the artwork committee - Gormley would be great with our Brutalist Architecture.

A: A steering group for the public art will be set up and more details will be shared in due course.

Q: Don't worry too much about adding art - the great thing about Barbican spaces is that the Barbican itself is such a stunning environment.

We agree that it is stunning! With all these items it's about getting the balance right. The requirement for the public artwork (as well as the play and exercise equipment) has been driven by our series of meetings with the planners. We are mindful of your points but are also mindful of what is required by planning.

Exercise/Play trails

Q: The play equipment appears to be concentrated between Ben Jonson and Frobisher Crescent, why are they not located next to the Conservatory where they are not overlooked by flats and less affected by noise?

A: We've seen the activity zones that were identified in the central Vista as the main focal point running in front of Frobisher Crescent and where these main areas of activity in the main areas of footfall will be located and there's less scope around by the conservatory. Also, one of the things we have to be aware of is that in the future there may be changes to the conservatory itself with a potential entrance to that location so this needs to be kept clear and flexible for future use.

Q: Will there be signage to indicate play areas are indeed available to children, whose parents may be confused about sculpture vs playground. Or will it be obvious?

A: This is likely to be something that can be included in part of the wayfinding strategy. Also it is worth noting that there is also the opportunity for art and play to be integrated. So, it doesn't always necessarily need to be one or the other.

Q: There are several mentions of "exercise" but no mention of anything tangible

A: We're mainly talking about the different trails: the play trail or the log features to climb on or walk across. You've also got the different sort of art trails and nature trails running across the podium as well. But there won't be any physical gym equipment if that's what the question was referring to.

Q: Who is expected to use the play equipment - residents or the public?

A: We are expecting both the public and residents to use the play equipment.

Q: Are the play areas, exercise areas going to be right next to Frobisher, which is already an antisocial behaviour location?

A: Some of them will be within close proximity to Frobisher – the plan with the blue dots identified shows where they will be located. Not directly close to the perimeter, but there are relatively narrow spaces in some areas.

Other feedback statements:

- Don't forget this is public space in a densely residential area, so it's character should be one of tranquillity and peacefulness - and that itself will be attractive to other visitors.
- Be wary of spoiling the tranquillity with an emphasis on too much activity (eg exercise) - this relates to the concerns about ASB

Wayfinding

There were numerous questions asked about wayfinding and in particular any plans for signage into and out of the podium, including street level signage.

A: We have appointed a wayfinding team who are developing a wayfinding strategy. This planning application relates to the red line and therefore the works are constrained to that red line boundary.

As part of the strategy that's currently in its early stages (we've only just completed stage one), we know that we need to look at key access points i.e. at the bottom of ramps and steps.

The City of London will also be looking at a strategy more broadly – it is important to discuss these with the wider Barbican Centre, Barbican Estate and also London and TFL. And there's no point in having a standalone wayfinding system for the small part of the podium.

Design details including Tiling

Q: What level of discussion about the design details have you had so far with Historic England or have they just responded to initial proposals submitted without discussion, pending the application?

A: We have held several consultation meetings with Historic England and have met them several times on site and we've walked across the podium with some representatives from the 20th Century Society. They've gone through all of our proposals and made recommendations which we have accommodated

Q: Will the paving tiles be replaced with the same as phase one? Will they be slip-resistant?

A: We intend to use the same tile manufacturer as Phase One. Ketley have been approved by Historic England and provide the same unit size and finish that is consistent with the existing tiles. In testing the Ketley tiles are more slip resistant. The 'waffle' tiles create slip issues particularly in the winter months. The indents store water making them slippery for longer and pose significant issues during freezing weather with ice more freely forming on the surface.

Q: Has the prescribed sizes of the tiles been changed - the tiles in phase 1 were bowed from the start.

A: There were issues with some of the suppliers of the early tiles, but the quality did improve during phase one. It's important to get that consistent unit size that works with the other parts of the Barbican and we have been discussing this with Historic England and looking at lessons learnt from phase one. There's an area particularly between the crossover between phase one and phase two, where a lot more of the reddish tile was used than it should have been. We will set up a quality control panel for this to check the tile quality and to ensure that we get a consistent approach to the 40:40:20 mix.

Seating

Q: Are the timber benches going to be robust and fixed to podium? Existing ones are constantly vandalised and I have seen people move them around

A: Yes. New more robust benches have been selected with a consistent finish that will be attached to the podium. They will have back and arm rests.

Q: It looks as though the seating will be further away from the blocks of flats - is this true, or are there just going to be lots more seats.

A: There would be more seating, particularly to the Northern side of Ben Johnson house. Around Breton House, those seats have been removed. Where we've been able to, we've tried to move seats away from residents' windows and in front of planted areas.

Phase 1

Q: So much of the hard landscaping is currently blighted by efflorescence / salts leeching out of the mortar around the tiles. Is there a solution to prevent this in these works?

A: This calcification always happens to a certain extent, but we need to minimise this by firstly getting the water off the surface, which is fundamental to the design of Phase 2. Furthermore, as part of the contract that will be agreed with the contractor, there will be an operational maintenance plan which will set out the cleaning regime that will be required post hand over.

Q: What will be done to ensure that the work is of an appropriate quality. The quality of Phase 1 is poor, with gaps between tiles and broken tiles already.

A: We have carried out a lot of research on the issues arising from phase one, and obviously the design team has taken that into account. The design strategy is more robust and more comprehensive than phase one. Secondly, we will be appointing a Clerk of Works to manage and scrutinise standards on site during the actual construction phase as well. So, we were boosting our quality management.

We now know that an intrinsic part of the works that were not carried out in phase one was the drainage, the surface drainage, and an important part of our strategy is that the water needs to be removed from the surface as quickly as possible, which is why we are looking at all the surface water drainage in phase two. But equally we intend to pick up the surface water drainage in phase one, within the scope and remix of the works for phase.

Construction

Q: What can we expect in terms of noise, dust and other disturbances? Will the access from the Barbican station to the Ben Jonson house via podium be restricted during the project?

A: We will look to minimise the noise, dust and vibration where possible, but given the extent and scope of this project it can't be delivered without some disturbance. Our challenge is to try and minimise the impact of that work on the surrounding residents. There will be a zoned approach to minimise the disruption, certainly in terms of access and use of the general area, but also a requirement of the planning and consent will be that there is an approved construction management plan (CMP) which the successful contractor will need to develop, and that will be subject to scrutiny of the project team and will be consulted on with residents.

Q: Is there any asbestos inside the podium and if yes, how can any potential contamination risks be avoided?

A: We've carried out podium-wide asbestos surveys and identified all areas that could contain asbestos which have been surveyed in detail. For any areas where it has been identified, there will be stringent plans in place for its removal.

Q: Is the building hub/sight compound going to be next to Frobisher?

A: At this stage, we don't know where the exact locations will be; we will be working through these with the contractor when they are appointed. However, the area directly next to Frobisher could be used for overnight storage of small vehicles and storage of materials, though with obvious weight limitations. This is one of several possible areas that, that some equipment could be stored.

Q: What about the welfare set up?

Again, this is to be finalised, but one of the likely locations is the north western side of Ben Johnson house where there's an area that has been used as a site compound previously. One of the things we're aware of is because there's going to be many phases, we would work with a contractor to identify different hoisting points, so that all the material doesn't have to be transported across the podium on vehicles. We will be trying to explore if there's an opportunity to transport materials at surface level and bring it up at different locations across the podium.

Other

Q: Will there be an opportunity to have a public lift or escalator to the podium from Golden Lane through the Exhibition Hall when the yellow shed is removed?

A: As this project is focussed on the waterproofing of the podium, this won't be possible at this stage. However, as a longer-term aspiration it's a very valid point because there is a lack of lift access up to the podium. It's a great suggestion and something that should be incorporated in future schemes either within the exhibition halls or elsewhere.

Q: How is this being paid for?

A: The project as a whole is proposed to be funded from the On Street Parking Reserve – this will amount to about 80% of the cost. The remaining costs will be from the City's General Fund.

Q: From an aesthetic viewpoint, proposal sounds good. But it will show up the wretchedness of the lower podium around Defoe House. What does the City plan to do to ensure there is consistency between the two?

A: There is a long-term programme of works for all of the Barbican podium areas.

Q: Will there be composting bins?

A: We are currently not proposing bins. We can explore this with Barbican wildlife groups and the Open Spaces maintenance team.

Q: What is the expected increase in footfall in the area? What times of the week / day is this expected?

A: We don't have a definitive response for that. We would expect an increase during daytime hours, particularly in lunchtime and afternoons in the main central area, particularly with the removal of the link building and allowing a direct route through.

Other general comments, not questions

- We don't want the route broken up. The proposal is great.
- The removal of the link and creation of the open vista is a very welcome move, as is the change in the shape and layout of the planting beds to better reflect the character of the original design.
- Thank you for this presentation. Given the constraints of the site and its listed status this is an imaginative proposal that seeks to meet the needs of all the users of this public space. There is also clear evidence that previous comments and feedback have been heard and responded to. Well done.

5: Conclusion

In summary, the webinars were a good opportunity for Atkins to present their updated plans for the Barbican and for the project team to answer questions from the public. The webinar presentation and recording are available on the project website for anyone to re-watch or share with neighbours or colleagues. A number of emails sharing feedback and suggestions have been received by the team and these will all be reviewed ahead of submitting a planning application to the City of London. The team will continue to liaise with the community through and following submission of a planning and listed building consent application to the City of London.

ENDS