



Image: Ibrahim Mahama Purple Hibiscus installation, Barbican lakeside 10 April to 18 August (copyright Dion Barrett / Barbican Centre)

Future Cities Forum

Cultural Cities Report

July 2024

Introduction

Future Cities Forum held its 'Cultural Cities' discussion event at the British Film Institute. While the expansion of film studios in the UK was highlighted, the debate also asked questions about the past and future funding of museums and cultural spaces. This is already an important topic for some pressure groups in the run up to the UK election this July. Museums have been struggling with budget cuts from local authorities. Will the next government increase funding for this important sector?

The discussion looked at how current arts funding is encouraging diversity and inclusion, as well as the use of sustainable materials for art installations and heritage experience. Highlighting the social value of museums to attract funding and the importance of preserving cultural programmes between the UK and Germany was also a topic discussed as well as the challenges of supporting the redevelopment of historic artists' homes such as Leighton House, in Kensington, against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Grenfell disaster.

Contributing organisations included The Barbican's Head of Visual Arts Shanay Jhaveri, Buro Happold's Partner Andrew Wylie, Creative PEC's Head of Policy, Bernard Hay, Arts Council England's Director and Head of International Nick McDowell, Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's Head Curator for Leighton House and Sambourne House, Daniel Robbins, David Artis, Architect Director at BDP, Reverend Dr Gordon Giles, Canon Chancellor of Rochester Cathedral, Jamie Andrews, Head of Public Engagement, The British Library, Mark Tugman, Associate, MICA Architects, author Sir Simon Jenkins, Danielle Patten, Director: Creative Programmes and Collections at The Museum of the Home, Gareth Wilkins, Partner, Pilbrow and Partners and Jason Lebidineuse, Director, Scott Brownrigg.



Image: 'wrapping' the Barbican, courtesy Buro Happold

1

Cultural expression to encourage diversity in the arts

Head of Visual Arts at the Barbican, Shanay Jhaveri, joined the discussion to talk about the current 'wrapping' of the cultural centre and described how he hoped this and other art initiatives would help to 'cross the threshold of spaces' in the 1950's development and begin to 'speak to the breadth of audiences' coming to the centre.

The 2,300 sq. m of cloth, which has engulfed the Barbican in a vibrant purple colour, is embroidered with 'batakaris'—a traditional Ghanaian men's garment originating in the north of the country. The fabric has been hand-woven together in a collective effort with hundreds of craftspeople from Tamale, northern Ghana. The work also references the 2003 novel, 'Purple Hibiscus', by Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In the book, the purple hibiscus symbolises freedom and hope for oppressed people.

Shanay said:

'The architecture of the Barbican can be divisive but artists gravitate to it and I wanted to give them the building as a canvas. The building has a heritage but we can use it to confront issues collectively today. I wanted to look at the activation of the lake side terrace and

invited the Ghanaian artist Ibrahim Mahama for a site visit and he came back with a drawing of the installation that is currently on display. He is very interested in textiles that have history embedded in them but he also wanted to respond to the heritage of the site with the area around the Barbican being the centre of the rag trade post world war two.

'Looking at the concrete of the Barbican building, we noticed it was bush-hammered by hand and although we know nothing of who did the work at the time, we wanted to reference that in the material that wraps the building through the hand-stitching of the fabric. Four-hundred artisans were involved in the artwork in Ghana and it created the economy for the project which was supported by the Barbican. Traditional smocks or batakaris are handed down through families with traces of the wearer and they have reached the end of their life cycles so used here in the art work. For sustainability purposes they will be taken back to Ghana and re-used for other projects in the community where Ibrahim has established studios and other community spaces.



Image: Ibrahim Mahama Purple Hibiscus project with Red Clay Tamale - Barbican Centre and White Cube

'This is the type of project that I want to highlight at the Barbican. We want to work with diverse and international artists providing them with a platform and partner with them. I want these artists and their work to speak to audiences in London and encourage those audiences to come back to the Barbican to see our commitment level to those artists.

'The current twenty-four hour 'destination city' idea is very much a part of what we are doing here, encouraging families not just to come and eat here at our restaurants but get involved in projects which are also open to local schools this summer. We want to create dynamic spaces with art that goes beyond ticketed events and we are also furthering dialogue through the digital assets that we create such as our videos of the project and enjoy seeing how it is all taken up online through social media.'



Image: Ibrahim Mahama Purple Hibiscus installation, Barbican lakeside 10 April to 18 August (copyright Dion Barrett / Barbican Centre)

The physical wrapping of the Barbican was a considerable challenge that required the expert skills of engineering firm, Buro Happold. Partner, Andrew Wylie explained:

'We treated the project as if we were 'upholsterers', attaching a backing to the material to help it withstand the elements. As the Barbican is a listed building we could not fix any of the material to it. You cannot drill into concrete because then you start to create problems. So we added weights and sub frames to the material and hundreds of kilometers of ratchet straps.

'There was the challenge of wind speeds to deal with, so we worked on the risk management as if we were sailors, enabling the fabric to be lifted and lowered with the wind speed, like trimming sails.

The sustainability of the Barbican re-use of materials is close to the heart of how Buro Happold works. Andrew as Head of Culture at the firm has been closely involved in the issues of sustainability in many of his arts and heritage projects. One such project addressed the carbon footprint of Bath Abbey.

'There have been many concerns about the cost of operating heritage assets and the shock of energy prices hasn't helped. Bath Abbey through the visitor experience has become more than just a place of worship and questions about how it is heated year round have been asked.

'The solution lay in the great drain from the Roman Baths which flows out into the river at 25 degrees centigrade. We wanted to use it to heat the abbey so used a heat pump to raise

the temperature to 50 degrees and dug low level trenches to give a background warmth and prevent damp. The challenge was not to subject people to bugs in the water and also stop the systems from calcifying. The Heritage Lottery Fund supported the project but it was the public engagement to sell the benefits that helped with the fundraising.'



Above: Bath Abbey was the last medieval cathedral to be constructed in England (Courtesy Buro Happold)

Funding the UK's cultural assets and arts programmes in Europe

Future Cities Forum asked Bernard Hay, Head of Policy at the Creative Industries Policy & Evidence Centre (Creative PEC), to join our 'Cultural Cities' forum to discuss the concerns over funding our cultural assets. Many museums are facing difficult times because of cuts to funding from local authorities.

The Museums Association reports that an advocacy survey commissioned by Art Fund and the National Museum Directors' Council (NMDC) has demonstrated strong public support for public funding for museums, with nearly three quarters of UK adults believing that councils should fund local museums. The YouGov survey found that 89% of UK adults think museums are important to UK culture while 76% think local museums add value to their area.

Creative PEC is led by Newcastle University, with the RSA, and operates a north-south, twin-hub to bring benefits to the creative industries across the whole country. Creative PEC started in 2018 at Nesta, and in 2023 moved to Newcastle University, evolving to a twin-hub structure with the southern hub based at RSA House. It provides a step-change for its three main stakeholders – industry, policymakers and the wider research community – in the quantity and quality of evidence available for the Creative Industries.

Bernard said:

'Culture is known for bringing well-being, pride of place and a sense of community as well as trust, so our work is in how to bring awareness of this wider or social value beyond the purely economic and support the case to the government on how not to reduce that to a GVA figure.

'We support this through our 'Culture and Heritage Capital Framework' for the DCMS and take our evaluation methods to try to quantify the value of museums and cultural institutions not just in monetary value but the wider impacts for the UK.

'There are some types of culture that are still struggling post pandemic such as independent cinema venues and local funding is a really big challenge. Local authorities are the biggest funder and are having to make cuts, so we need to find ways to offset that.



Image above: Arts Council England is working on 'Cultural Bridge' in cities such as Berlin

Museum Island with River Spree courtesy - copyright Sean Pavone

Continued funding for international arts programmes has also proved a challenge post Brexit and the pandemic. Arts Council England's Head of International, Nick McDowell, explained that supporting community projects has been very important in both the UK and Germany, rather than trying to helicopter culture in:

'Both the UK and Germany have similar cultural infrastructures and funding as well as a shared mental processing. Brexit really showed us that post referendum, we needed to make friends in Europe. We started to develop strong relationships with the British Council in Berlin and the Goethe Institute in London.

'Most of the money from government goes into theatres and opera houses in Berlin that are spread apart and there is very little in the centre of the city. We therefore set our sights on social engaged practice and community work. There are so many areas where there is no culture anywhere and we decided not to helicopter culture in but build up from the grass roots.

'There is a commitment to diversity in Germany just like the UK but they cannot collect diversity statistics, it is against the law. So with our current Cultural Bridge programme we decided that sixty-two per cent projects should be with disabled or diverse backgrounds.

'Brexit is a big problem but you might say climate change is bigger. Digital programmes are not the answer. The next generation of artists are suffering horribly. There just are not the resources to deal with issues such as supporting artists over permissions to work in Europe for continued periods. It's difficult.'

Cultural Bridge is a programme that aims to build links between the cultural sectors in the UK and Germany. Each partnership is a collaboration between one or more organisations in each country, which will provide opportunities for artistic exchange and knowledge sharing, and develop new work that explores issues faced by communities across both countries.

Funding for the programme comes from a partnership between Arts Council England, Arts Council Northern Ireland, Arts Council Wales/Wales Arts International, Creative Scotland, British Council, Fonds Soziokultur, and Goethe-Institut London.

New partnerships will receive up to £10,000, while continuing partnerships, which have taken part in previous years of the programme, will receive up to £30,000. With the newly announced partnerships, Cultural Bridge now supports 72 organisations through 35 partnerships.

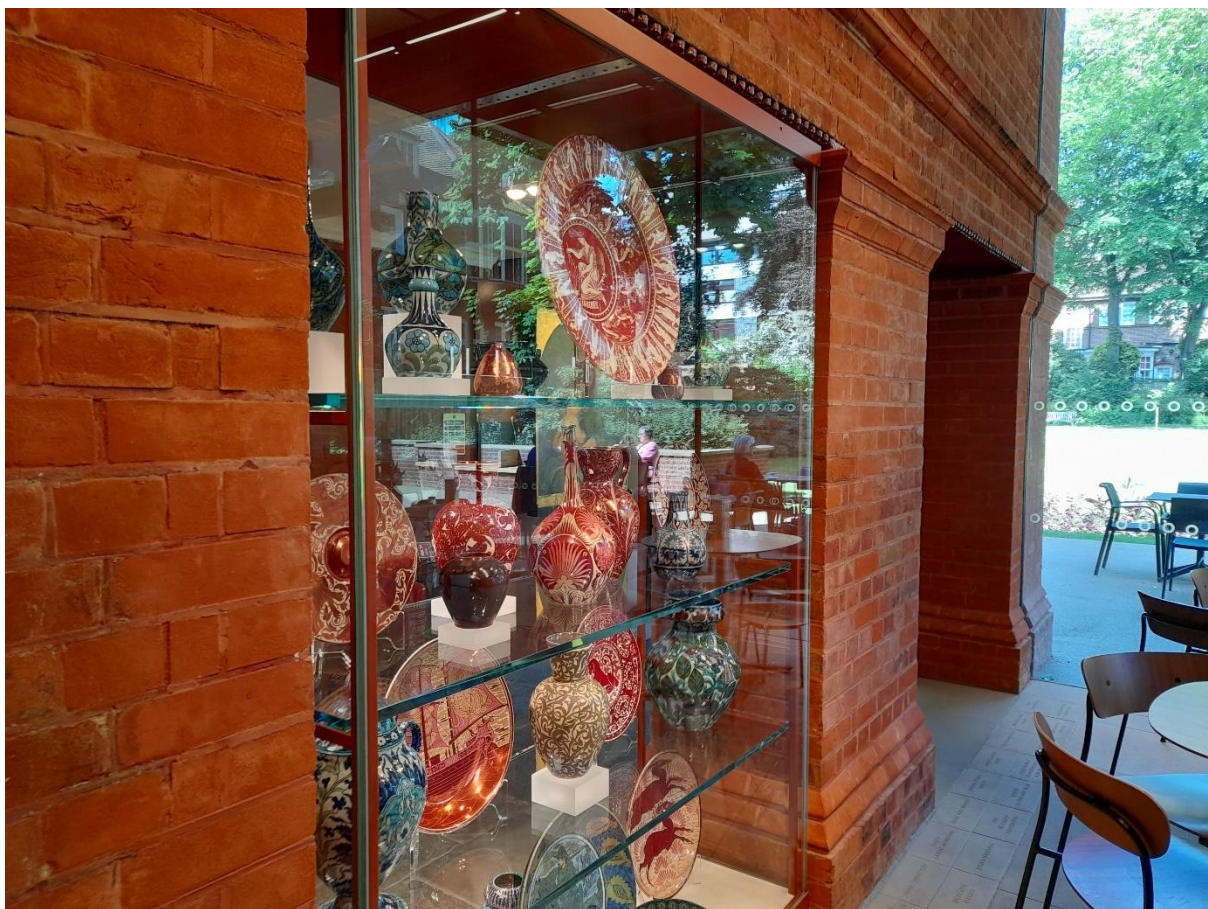


Image: part of BDP's redevelopment of Leighton House, showing café wall showcasing William De Morgan ceramics

Leighton House, the former home of Victorian artist and sculptor, Lord Leighton, in Kensington, London, has been a museum that has also seen difficulties with funding. The London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's Senior Curator, Daniel Robbins, added to the discussion by talking about the history of approach in redeveloping the house as cultural centre.

He said:

'The council took it on in 1926 and it then became a museum. In the 1950's some additions were made and the winter studio was infilled. Over the years, it has at times been in a poor condition and just sitting there, but it still had a role in supporting the broader council ambitions. The additions that had been previously added were considered something that could be re-visited, with better facilities such as toilets, lift and a shop. These improvements have meant that it could change the dynamic of the spaces for visitors and its community.

'I have just been to a committee that is looking at evaluating its social investment incomes and Leighton House would be a good case study in that sense. The idea of the Leighton House redevelopment really began twenty years ago and at one point it was put in the 'waste management and leisure' council department. I thought this was a crazy idea because it should be in the educational department. But it turned out to be the best thing that could have happened, because it was in that department that the idea came with how a series of capital investments could be made into it.

'Then Grenfell happened and the council withdrew all its capital. What saved it was that fifty per cent of funding came from the Lottery and from the friends association. With this external funding, it has become a place where there are learning and public programmes and it is free to enter.



Image: 'Oneness' at Leighton House, courtesy of BDP

BDP architect Director David Artis explained how the project to transform Leighton House has been concerned on one level with showcasing wider cultural values:

'There is a specific character to the place and you can see the way Lord Leighton adapted his house over time. He built it at a point in Victorian society where the place of an artist was lower than other parts of upper class society, to a stage where artists were revered - the age of the artist celebrity.

'An important part of the project was to build the connectivity with the garden to provide a space for the community and creating an ability for visitors to feel comfortable and take ownership. Previously you had to access the house by steps and this was a divisive measure. We managed to diffuse that and design the Perinn Wing as the precursor to the house, a place where visitors can collect themselves before entering Lord Leighton's home.

'As a visitor you now have a choice to engage with the house or just enjoy the exhibition space. The new staircase talks to cross cultural values and there are references to Sambourne House, which was owned by the leading cartoonist of Punch. So links have been created to the wider culture of the borough.'

BDP adds:

'A new staff suite has been created within the volume of the upper gallery space. Leighton's Winter Studio has been restored and the space beneath it recovered as the De Morgan Café. The existing basement has been extended to provide visitor facilities, display and

interpretation space, an archive store and a gallery to display Leighton's extensive drawing collection.

'The new stair and lift 'rotunda' completes the evolution and expansion of the house, connects all levels and balances the composition of the garden elevation. It is the site of 'Oneness', a hand-painted mural by artist Shahrzad Ghaffari.'



Above: Leighton House Museum and Gallery, Kensington London, showing Lord Leighton's winter studio to the left and viewed from the newly designed and planted garden



Above: Hay Castle with its Jacobean mansion – restored by MICA Architects in an award-winning project

2

Heritage – new tourism drives and community uses

The second part of our discussion event looked at the power of heritage to regenerate cities and towns, that have suffered through Covid and the economic downturn and how our castles and cathedrals are being re-invented through new tourists and community uses.

Recently, there have been moves in cities such as Venice to charge tourists a city tax on their day-trip, to help with the cost of preserving heritage. Should the next UK government take the decision to do the same? Why are visitor numbers to our English cathedrals growing and is there a recognition that funding should be provided to display medieval texts and treasures - often hidden from view? How can isolated communities use heritage to activate their social spaces, such as markets, and how can culture draw visitors into previously unloved parts of cities?

Reverend Dr Gordon Giles spoke of the importance of making Rochester Cathedral accessible to all and using its heritage alongside cultural experiences to draw in visitors:

'The cathedral is in Medway, part of Kent and there is a richness of tourist attraction here such as the Dockyard Museum in Chatham, which was a major employer when it was an active site owned by the Royal Navy. The area however is not wealthy but it does help to have a high speed train line which has been a good investment for region.

'Rochester Cathedral has been a cultural venue since 604, but in more recent times and just before Covid we drew some headlines in having a mini golf in the nave and this caused a scandal. We had so many visitors with lots of people saying that they had never been to the cathedral before. Our income streams are very tight and sometimes we charge to see exhibitions. We had the Lego Bridge here as well and that was very popular.



Above: Detail from Textus Roffensis manuscript showing Draco Roffensis (courtesy Rochester Cathedral / BBC History)

'This October we will be putting on an exhibition around a medieval piece of writing called Textus Roffensis. It makes Magna Carta look modern and useless. It is the oldest book of laws - a compilation - while Magna Carta is just a page and we have it in a special glass case. There is one picture in it of a dragon. We borrowed the Rochester Bible and Bestiary last year. Although not precise, this year is the 900th anniversary of Textus Roffensis, and are

working with artist Wendy Dawes to create a huge 15-meter long dragon which will be suspended above the nave.

'Wendy works with the blind on tactile projects and the scales will be gold, silver and bronze. Visitors have been able to draw and write on them. We stole the idea from Peter Walker who designed and made the peace doves that we displayed in the cathedral. We have the highest proportion of refugees from Ukraine in the UK and the idea was to write messages of peace on the dove-shaped cards.'



Image: 'Before' image of the Typhoo factory in Digbeth, Birmingham that is being redeveloped for new BBC Studios, courtesy of BDP

Author Sir Simon Jenkins in his book 'England's Cathedrals' praises Rochester Cathedral for the Norman architecture, but also points in contrast to how 'cultural scruffiness' is drawing people back into cities:

'I have been writing a history of British architecture, looking at the way cities have developed or not and the future of urban renewal. There is no doubt about it, cultural renewal is bringing young people into cities. It's the bits of cities attracting people which have cultural interest. It is not just the big, glamorous cultural attractions that are popular, more the back street scruffiness that people like - Portobello Road for example is absolutely fizzing at the moment. I was walking round Bradford with its great Victorian palaces the other day with the Chief Executive of the City Council and she said 'I want Bradford to be the Shoreditch of Leeds'. The more I thought about it, the more I thought she was right. If you go to Birmingham's jewellery district for instance, it is very scruffy but attractive, so I think conserving heritage buildings and districts in cities is very important.'

'One mustn't worry about gentrification that can happen because of cultural attraction, how you handle it of course is a different matter. Putting up council houses will kill it. You need to save bits and preferably the poorer bits. Marylebone Lane is a good example where you now have many workshops off it. The Corporation of London didn't want the cultural bit that came with the Barbican, as it was viewed as an offence against the podium. The Barbican now has to get people back at ground level, but you cannot walk round it, it is so paved and is the death of 'the street'.

'The cultural move east in London is what happens in cities, but I think it is full of luxury flats predominantly for wealthier people. Brexit of course is a disaster on all levels, not just culture. If you rely on the state you will have trouble some of the time. I think it is terrible that tourists come into our cities and don't pay a tax but visit our museums, it is just giving tax payers' money away to tourists. What matters to me is how artists survive, where they settle and how those communities thrive where they live.'

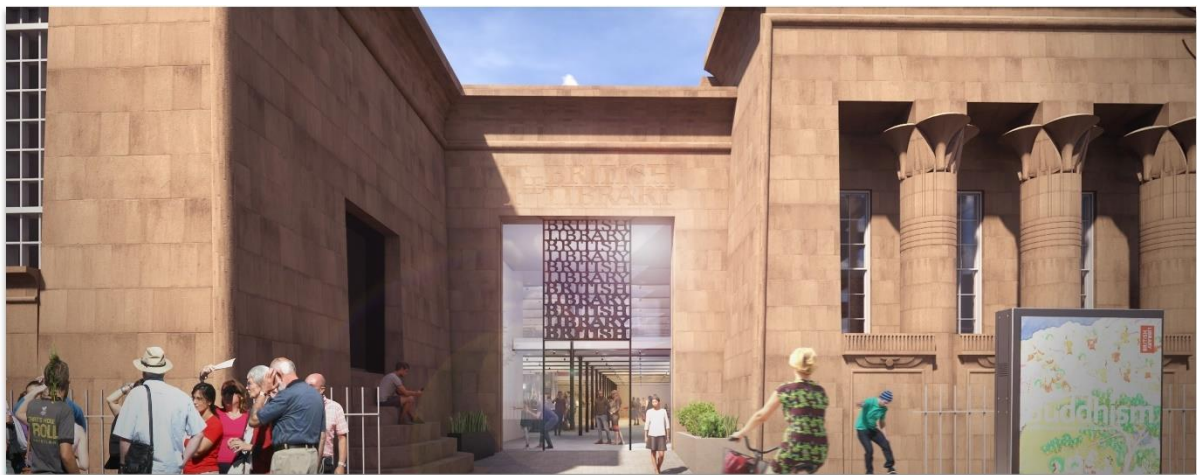


Image: CGI of the redevelopment of Temple Works, Leeds, courtesy of The British Library

There are many interesting heritage buildings in Leeds dating from the 18th and 19th centuries and Temple Works, a former flax mill is one of them. It has seen better days, but has been taken on by The British Library, to be re-developed as a collections store and community space. Jamie Andrews, Head of Public Engagement, joined the forum to describe the challenge and importance:

'The newly elected Mayor of West Yorkshire and the Leader of Leeds City Council have been making the point that cultural anchors such as the National Poetry Centre, The British Library and the Royal Armouries are crucial in driving investment into cities, and to help with the development of new housing. As you said, the British Library has taken on this extraordinary building with an Egyptian frontage, which is Grade I listed but it's on the Historic England 'at risk' register.

'We have roots in the city. We celebrated our 50th birthday last year, established by Act of Parliament in 1972, and right from the start we had a base in West Yorkshire - forty acres at

Boston Spa. Originally it was part of a 200-acre munitions factory site employing thousands of people, mostly women from Leeds during the second world war. In the 1960s the site was acquired for The National Lending Library for Science and Technology which then became the British Library. Over the years we have invested in the region, grown our staff there to 500 people, and the vast part - two thirds - of the library's physical collection over 100 million objects is stored there.

'When we did a review a few years back on our impact in the region we decided that we were too detached from the city. We felt that the special building of Temple Works in Holbeck was right for us - and it was once thought to be the biggest single room in the world at two acres in size. The design of the frontage, by Joseph Bonomi the Younger, was based on the Temple of Horus at Edfu. The grass on the roof was grazed by sheep, historically. These associations from the first industrial revolution we want to continue, for instance on the theme of 'green roofs' in this current industrial / technological revolution.

'It's what we do in the building that will be important, including a full range of library services but with a focus on learning and innovation. There will be a particular emphasis on young people. We are part of the Leeds Transformation Regeneration Partnership including regional government and Homes England, and we expect the building's development and new use to act as a catalyst to other growth going on in Leeds, working with our partners. We won't wait for the building to open to engage more with the city community, as we are working with local cultural organisations already.'

Mark Tugman, Associate at MICA Architects joined the discussion to talk about the importance of preserving heritage for more isolated communities in the UK and how this could activate interest in their shared cultural spaces. An example of this has been the practice's work to redevelop Hay Castle, in Hay, Wales.

MICA has described the project:

Hay Castle Trust began to realise their vision for the preservation and sustainable re-use of Hay Castle and associated buildings in 2015. The project creates a culturally and economically vibrant centre for the arts and training at the heart of this historic town. The project rescues and conserves the critically at-risk medieval keep and the Jacobean mansion, restore and open the ancient gate - the oldest of its kind in the UK, and reinstate the vital connection between the castle and the town. A museum-standard gallery will host touring exhibitions from major collections, a platform high in the castle keep will offer stunning and historic views out from this ancient monument, and a characterful learning space will engage the young and old alike, allowing all the chance to enjoy, love and cherish this iconic castle.



Above: gate at Hay Castle restored by MICA Architects (Image copyright Andy Stagg)

Mark commented:

'The castle has been closed to visitors, derelict and impenetrable after several fires in the 1600s and with the gate shut. and it has a very large embankment closing it off from the town. It has only been used as a backdrop to the Hay Festival but one of the challenges we see with cultural organisations is the over-reliance on one major event each year, which was the case with Hay. We have tried to be sensitive to history, but also to incorporate the daily life of the town. People want somewhere different to sit, and somewhere to go and have a coffee. There have been sensitive restoration phases within the castle but we have now opened the main gate and entrance again, creating a series of paths and spaces from that to the town centre so they becomes part of the town and the marketplace.'

On the Waterloo master-plan in London, where Grimshaw is leading a project for Network Rail and Lambeth Council, Mark was asked about MICA's role in transforming the Festival Hall's riverside frontage into spaces for eating, drinking and relaxing. Mark said:

'There are comparisons to be made between the Southbank master-plan project which the then Rick Mather Architects (now MICA) worked on, and the challenges for Waterloo. As part of preserving the new cultural institutions created for the 1951 Festival of Britain, a 'podium' was made which separated the street from the river, and the Festival Hall venue was designed to allow five thousand people to leave very quickly, as with a football stadium.'

The design had not factored in what the building might do when concerts were not being held. The Hungerford Bridge crossing was dangerous. The river wharves had been damaged during the war. Streets need to be places where people move and stop and spend time. On master-plans, we have to be careful. In the 1950s there was not the same approach. There needs to be a cultural masterplan, a civic master-plan and a commercial master-plan - and that is a microcosm of the city.'



Image: looking down into the town of Hay from a new viewing platform at the restored Hay Castle, courtesy of Mica Architects

3

Updating museums for the digital age, film studio expansion and theatre re-design

The third part of Future Cities Forum's 'Cultural Cities' discussion, looked at the growth of modern culture and its relevance to present day audiences, how it is funded and the built environment that will be required in the future for creative endeavour. Questions asked included:

How do we update galleries for modern audiences and districts?

Should the UK government be investing more in culture for communities?

How do we educate the next generation and build creative studio spaces for film production?

Danielle Patten of the Museum of the Home (formerly the Geffrye Museum) in Hoxton joined the discussion.

The Museum of the Home has faced the challenge of updating its collections with a new gallery looking at the 'home of the future'. This has been made possible in the first instance through a re-modelling by architects Wright & Wright which described the project:

'With a remarkable collection telling the story of domestic life housed in a set of richly atmospheric 18th century alms-houses, the Museum of the Home is an institution of national significance.

'The remodelling of the existing building, 92% of which is retrofit, doubled the publicly accessible areas, created 80% more exhibition space and ameliorated the building's deterioration, with no commensurate increase in energy consumption or the costly carbon count associated with a new build. The Museum is widely celebrated for its contributions to the public realm; it has received multiple awards and continues to be a thriving centre of civic engagement in the heart of Hackney.

'The scheme also improves public access through introducing a new main entrance directly opposite Hoxton Station, adds two new contemporary multi-functional garden pavilions together with a street-facing cafe. The design extends to landscaping, with new physical and

visual links for visitors to the Museum's gardens – one of the largest and most ecologically rich green spaces in Hackney.

'When Wright & Wright were commissioned to remodel the Museum in 2014, it was under a growing set of pressures. The fabric of its Grade 1 listed buildings was in jeopardy, with structural weaknesses and outdated services. Collections were housed in poor conditions, circulation was inefficient, and education and exhibition spaces were at capacity.

'In developing and implementing a 'fabric first' approach, the spatial and experiential potential of the historic alms-house was the project's key impetus, catalysing an architecturally sustainable, sensitive and hugely effective outcome.'



Above: garden and pavilion studio at the Museum of the Home by Wright & Wright (Image courtesy Hufton + Crow)

Danielle Patten continued in our discussion:

'The 2021 redevelopment allowed for new spaces and a new gallery in the basement. This was so important to get away from the existing corridors which were not very pleasant to be in and was difficult for large groups to visit, especially schools. It provided more circulation.

'Importantly, it allowed us to make changes to the galleries to represent our local communities. Hoxton is a place that has really changed and east London is now a home for thriving artists and creatives. We wanted to respond to that. We are famous for our period rooms looking at the home environment over 400 years, but we needed a new gallery so that more objects could be out of the archive and on display and we wanted to allow people to tell of their own home experiences and tell their stories.'

'Our future homes gallery looks at how we can build our homes of the future. It includes new ideas of storage and how to insulate our homes for example. Of course we needed the research to do this, so we needed to partner up with Northumbria University which has all the knowledge about home gadgets and tech through to connectivity. It is harder and harder to find funding for new galleries, so the partnership is really important to us. Lots of interesting questions will come up through visitors visiting the gallery which opens this July, such as - will we be afraid to leave our homes in the future, how interactive will they be etc.? We are looking forward to our visitor engagement and seeing their reactions.'

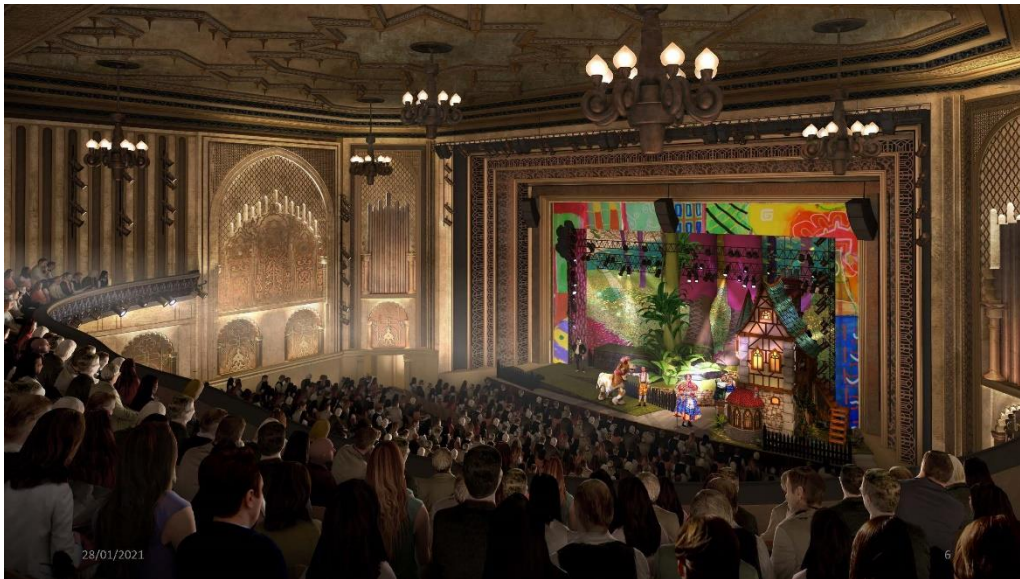


Image: regeneration of Granada EMD cinema into Soho Theatre, courtesy Pilbrow & partners

The London Borough of Walthamstow has worked hard to build itself as a 'borough of culture' and this has in part been through funding and retrofitting heritage buildings such as the former Granada EMD cinema, which will open this autumn as a new centre for comedy, drawing visitors not just locally but from large distances around.

Pilbrow & Partners, architects in charge of the project describe the potential:

'The site comprises a Grade II* listed super cinema, recognised to be of national significance as a rare surviving example of the extravagant and flamboyant work of the Granada Group, their famed architect, Cecil Aubrey Masey, and interior designer, Theodore Komisarjevsky, at the height of the cinema boom of the 1930s.

'The restoration of the EMD will form the centrepiece of the wider, culturally-led regeneration initiative, promoted by Waltham Forest. The cultural and educational uses will be supported by restaurants and bars. In totality, the site will thus become a vibrant hub of activity by day and night and a major contributor to the local economy.

'This project enables Waltham Forest to further establish itself as a key player in London's creative and cultural scene with a unique cultural identity and serves the Borough aspirations to become London's first Borough of Culture in 2019. The project will create a destination for East London and support the growing evening economy.'

Gareth Wilkins of Pilbrow & Partners, who worked as an architect on the project, and joined our forum discussion thinks the centre will be highly successful:

'It will be called Soho Theatre and we have taken the space inside the cinema and divided it up to respect the heritage of the place. There was a challenge with the council to make it a sustainable building but keep the heritage, but I think we have found the right balance. After all, this was a place where Hitchcock (came to watch films) and the Rolling Stones used to come to and perform. It is a local theatre with a local profile, but such a good centre for the creative cluster the council are trying to build. It will mean that it upgrades the quality of artists that come into the area. It will have live productions that go global. The council are paying for it and it will be very well received by the community.'

Gareth commented that he did have concerns however with UK government funding of the arts in general:

'Culture in other countries is going strength to strength, but there is a lack of investment generally here. What is going on? We are leading in science but again not enough investment available. Germany has so much more. Cambridge is building thousands of new houses around the city and it should have cultural infrastructure built into it but I don't see it coming. There is a great lack of interest in the importance of culture in the UK, There is room for 'high' and 'low' art, but I think we have lost our global presence in this area. People now fly to Australia for it.'



Image: Shinfield Studios, Berkshire, courtesy of Scott Brownrigg

Arts Council England has been investing in cultural projects through the DCMS and in new areas such as gaming. But is this enough and how can the UK support the boom in the building of film studios?

There has been US investment in the UK film studio design and build over the last few years, but is the bubble about to burst? The recent actors' strike has halted production in some cases and now Scott Brownrigg's Director Jason Lebidineuse, says there needs to be thought to how to encourage the next generation of film makers. He commented:

"The investment into the film industry has come from abroad because of the great actors and production staff are all here, we have beautiful backdrops for filming and the financial incentives. The funding is coming from the US because filming is declining there and Canada is growing. The opportunity is huge. In 2019 it was known that the UK needed two million square feet to cope with the demand for film-making to happen here, otherwise it will go to Europe. There has been a large amount of expansion over the last five years and there is a thought that we may be nearing saturation, but there are differing opinions"

'The culture for film-making is revered here from around the world. As a practice we have looked at lots of sites and highlighted the best to our clients. Sometimes there is resistance from the community or an inability to source the power you might need. Shinfield Studios (near Reading) worked because it already had permission for a science park and that was the same for Sunset Studios (at Broxbourne) with permission for a business park. But industrial action has hurt the industry. No one did anything last year but I and others are hopeful that things will get going again at the end of this year.

'What we have to be mindful of is that the next generation of film-makers are currently children sitting in their bedrooms making their own films on Apple phones. Where will the funding come from to support them as they grow up? We need to be re-investing in our cities and buildings and identifying areas that we can build the right cultural spaces for them to develop their skills and for productions. The way we educate children needs to change and encourage the germs of an idea that they have so that it can make it to the big screen. What we need to focus on is developing smaller studios.'

Scott Brownrigg has described its impressive design project for Shinfield Studios:

'Our masterplan and architectural design for Shinfield Studios - a new state-of-the-art media hub at the previous Thames Valley Science Park [TSVP] in Berkshire - received full planning approval by Wokingham Borough Council in 2021. The £250 million film and TV studios will provide approximately 1,000,000 sqft of sound stages, workshops, offices and ancillary spaces, becoming one of the largest film and TV studios in the UK.

'The scheme forms part of a wider vision to create a new 'Cine Valley' in the Science Park, which also includes the approved purpose-built TV Studios for the University of Reading, also designed by Scott Brownrigg. These projects add to the practice's growing work and expertise within the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport sector.

Conclusions

- There is concern to support the funding 'Destination City' in the City of London and the Barbican is reaching out to diverse and international artists to give them a platform and encourage visitors to come and enjoy cultural expression throughout the day and the night.
- Engineers such as Buro Happold are finding new solutions to art installation challenges and those posed by sustainability. It worked with the environment rather than against it to secure the recent 'wrapping' of the Barbican and used the water from the Roman Baths to heat Bath Abbey.
- There is a growing awareness of the need to highlight the social value of culture to attract funding. Arts Council England is supporting more cultural projects in Europe with diverse or disabled backgrounds. It says that the next generation of artists will require financial support post Brexit to survive.
- The National Heritage Lottery Fund and Friends' Association stepped in to protect heritage at Leighton House, when council funding fell away post-Grenfell. It has enabled renovations to ensure that a wider community can enjoy this special artist's home and that it is saved for the nation.
- English cathedrals are reaching out to a diverse range of visitors who perhaps believe that they do not relate to these religious/ heritage buildings. Mini golf and art works such as 'flying dragons' have been/are part of Rochester Cathedral's attractions for local people and the tourist venturing into Kent.
- Author Sir Simon Jenkins believes that culture and back-street scruffiness go hand-in-hand to bring people into cities. He stated during the discussion that it is important to save the poorer areas of towns and cities. However, the international tourist should be paying a tax to support our museums.

- The British Library insists that being part of the Leeds Transformation Regeneration Partnership and its renovation of Temple Works into a library and archive, will be a catalyst for further growth in the region. It highlights the importance of supporting young people in developing culture.
- MICA Architects stresses the importance of not relying on single festivals for the future economic health of towns. Its restoration of Hay Castle, with its' medieval gate and new pathways around it, has created a place for people living in the town and visitors to come to more regularly, enjoy the market and have a coffee, ensuring that activity is created year round.
- Some museums such as The Museum of the Home are finding funding difficult and are grateful for new partnerships with educational institutions such as Northumbria University for research support, in opening up new galleries.
- The restoration of the historic Granada EMD cinema in Walthamstow has created an excellent centre for the creative cluster the council is trying to create, but is also attracting a higher quality of artist to perform and some productions will be enabled to 'go global'. But Director, Gareth Wilkins warns of a lack of general interest in the arts in the UK and feels we have lost our global presence in this field.
- Scott Brownrigg is known for its exceptional film studio design in a market that has received large interest particularly from the US. However there is concern that education needs to change to support children's creativity and build smaller studios that in time as they grow they can access to develop the next generation of successful film-making.

Future Cities Forum would like to thank its contributors to this important debate. Watch out for details of our next 'Cultural Cities' event.

Below: Shanay Jhaveri describing the Barbican's Purple Hibiscus project at Future Cities Forum's discussion at the BFI Stephen Street.

