# Barbican Centre launches visionary overhaul to revive its largest exhibition halls



The Barbican Centre, a landmark of London’s post-war architectural ambition, is set to embark on an ambitious new chapter with a call for expressions of interest to transform its two large, famously underused exhibition halls. These halls, which have stood largely vacant since 2010, present an extraordinary opportunity to reinvigorate spaces that collectively span the size of 36 tennis courts. Situated strategically between key cultural and commercial hubs — including the new Museum of London at Smithfield, the historic Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and Smithfield Market — their redevelopment is envisioned as a cornerstone of the Square Mile’s evolving cultural identity.

This initiative is an integral part of the larger Barbican Renewal programme, a £230 million project led by Allies and Morrison alongside Asif Khan Studio, which aims to restore and enhance the Barbican’s iconic site for future generations. Originally designed by Chamberlin, Powell and Bon and completed in 1982 as a bold example of brutalist architecture interwoven with residential and cultural facilities, the Barbican Centre has undergone several upgrades in recent decades. These include a £12.6 million overhaul by Allford Hall Monaghan Morris in 2006 and a £3.4 million cinema and shop renewal, along with environmental enhancements to the main art gallery by RUFFARCHITECTS in 2019.

The current phase of renewal, funded primarily by a £191 million contribution from the City of London Corporation, prioritises the revitalisation of the foyers, lakeside terrace, and central conservatory, with construction planned to begin in 2027 to dovetail with the Barbican’s 50th anniversary celebrations in 2032. The refurbishment is designed not only to preserve the Barbican’s brutalist architectural heritage but also to significantly improve accessibility, sustainability, and inclusivity, ensuring the centre remains a vibrant, adaptable cultural venue for decades to come.

The two exhibition halls, long seen as key assets for conferences and commercial events, are now set for imaginative reinvention. Open calls are inviting proposals from a broad spectrum of sectors — including creative, commercial, and civic organisations — seeking innovative and sustainable concepts that enhance cultural engagement and public access while generating new income streams. Ideas for the halls may range from permanent transformation to interim uses that activate the space for local communities and visitors alike, potentially as joint or separate ventures.

Asif Khan, co-leading the renewal alongside Allies and Morrison, brings a distinctive architectural ethos to the project, combining respect for historical narratives with bold, contemporary interventions. Khan’s recent high-profile projects reflect this approach, such as the ongoing redevelopment of London’s Canada Dock and Liverpool’s Canning Dock, which thoughtfully engage with difficult historical legacies, and his work on the new Museum of London at Smithfield that blends modern design with heritage elements. His contribution to the Barbican Renewal aims to restore the centre’s original brutalist intent while shaping a facility that meets contemporary cultural and environmental demands.

The renewal programme is marked by extensive public engagement and co-design processes, especially involving younger audiences, to ensure the Barbican evolves in ways that resonate with a diverse population. Innovations include a fully accessible conservatory with dramatic planting schemes and water features, a rejuvenated lakeside terrace with climate-conscious landscaping, and flexible, inclusive foyers designed to bring the arts more visibly into the public realm. Landscape designers Harris Bugg Studio and a team of specialists in sustainability, heritage, lighting, and acoustics support the architectural vision, ensuring a holistic upgrade of the entire complex.

While the current procurement focusing on the exhibition halls is exploratory, with no final decisions expected at this stage, it will shape the strategic planning for the next phases and the potential partnerships needed to realise the vision. The halls’ redevelopment is expected to commence from 2028, reflecting a careful balance between preserving the Barbican’s historic fabric and enabling innovative, future-facing uses.

As the Barbican Renewal programme gathers momentum, it signals a critical moment for London’s cultural infrastructure — one that respects the past while boldly embracing new possibilities. By unlocking the potential of these vast underused spaces within one of the city’s most iconic brutalist complexes, this initiative could redefine how culture, community, and commerce intersect at the heart of the Square Mile.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/competitions/barbican-exhibition-halls-london), [[3]](https://www.archdaily.com/1024907/the-barbican-center-to-undergo-major-renewal-and-upgrade-planned-to-begin-first-phase-in-2027)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/competitions/barbican-exhibition-halls-london), [[4]](https://www.alliesandmorrison.com/projects/barbican-renewal)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/competitions/barbican-exhibition-halls-london), [[3]](https://www.archdaily.com/1024907/the-barbican-center-to-undergo-major-renewal-and-upgrade-planned-to-begin-first-phase-in-2027), [[5]](https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room/barbican-renewal-gathers-momentum-with-strong-public-backing-and-new-designs)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/competitions/barbican-exhibition-halls-london), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/81eeed47-98f7-4faa-91d3-05376866e63c)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/competitions/barbican-exhibition-halls-london), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/81eeed47-98f7-4faa-91d3-05376866e63c), [[4]](https://www.alliesandmorrison.com/projects/barbican-renewal)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.archdaily.com/1024907/the-barbican-center-to-undergo-major-renewal-and-upgrade-planned-to-begin-first-phase-in-2027), [[5]](https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room/barbican-renewal-gathers-momentum-with-strong-public-backing-and-new-designs), [[6]](https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room/barbican-unveils-ambitious-renewal-plans-as-public-consultation-launches)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/competitions/barbican-exhibition-halls-london), [[3]](https://www.archdaily.com/1024907/the-barbican-center-to-undergo-major-renewal-and-upgrade-planned-to-begin-first-phase-in-2027), [[6]](https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room/barbican-unveils-ambitious-renewal-plans-as-public-consultation-launches)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/competitions/barbican-exhibition-halls-london> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/81eeed47-98f7-4faa-91d3-05376866e63c> - Asif Khan, a British architect and designer, is undertaking several significant projects that reflect his versatile approach to architecture. Khan's current major works include transforming London's Canada Dock and Liverpool's historic Canning Dock, where he is creating a reflective space on the site's traumatic history related to the slave trade. In London, Khan is reimagining the Barbican Centre to restore its original brutalist intent and is also working on the new Museum of London at Smithfield, incorporating elements from its meat market heritage to retain its historical essence. Another notable project is the Tselinny Centre of Contemporary Culture in Kazakhstan, where Khan is preserving a Soviet-era cinema. Khan, known for his inventive temporary installations like the Coca-Cola Beatbox Pavilion at the London Olympics and Dubai Expo portals, is now focusing on creating enduring architectural works that blend historical reverence with modern aesthetics. ([ft.com](https://www.ft.com/content/81eeed47-98f7-4faa-91d3-05376866e63c?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.archdaily.com/1024907/the-barbican-center-to-undergo-major-renewal-and-upgrade-planned-to-begin-first-phase-in-2027> - The City of London Corporation has approved a £191 million funding package for the first phase of the Barbican Centre's five-year renewal program. The initiative is aimed at addressing critical repairs and upgrades to this Grade II-listed venue, including improvements to accessibility, energy efficiency, and overall functionality of its aging infrastructure. The Barbican Renewal began in 2021 with an international competition for the multi-disciplinary design team to lead the efforts. In 2022, Allies and Morrison, Asif Khan Studio, and Buro Happold were selected, in collaboration with specialists in sustainability, heritage, landscaping, lighting design, acoustics, and more. Construction is slated to begin in 2027, pending planning permission, with the first phase targeting completion by the Barbican's 50th anniversary in 2032. The project's architectural approach blends the preservation of the original design with necessary modernization. Extensive public consultation has already informed the design process, and further consultation is planned for early next year. The Renewal Program includes upgrades to the distinctive brutalist foyers, lakeside terrace, and the largest glasshouse in central London. The project prioritizes the sensitive preservation of the existing architecture while incorporating modern sustainable practices to achieve net-zero commitments. A major fundraising campaign launching in 2025 will supplement the City Corporation's funding, enabling broader community engagement and new creative learning activities. ([archdaily.com](https://www.archdaily.com/1024907/the-barbican-center-to-undergo-major-renewal-and-upgrade-planned-to-begin-first-phase-in-2027?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.alliesandmorrison.com/projects/barbican-renewal> - The Barbican was designed by Chamberlin Powell and Bon and built between 1965 and 1982. It is the original mixed-use development with residential, recreational and cultural facilities, alongside a lake and landscaping, conservatory, and high-rise housing all together on a 14ha site in the City of London. A collaborative design team led by Allies and Morrison and Asif Khan Studio is designing a multi-million pound renewal of the Barbican’s arts centre and public spaces. The project will preserve the iconic building's original architectural vision, while providing new opportunities for the Barbican's diverse community of partners, artists and audiences, and boosting the buildings’ accessibility and environmental performance. ([alliesandmorrison.com](https://www.alliesandmorrison.com/projects/barbican-renewal?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room/barbican-renewal-gathers-momentum-with-strong-public-backing-and-new-designs> - These new images reflect a vision for the Barbican Centre that stays true to our unique heritage and bold character while making us an inclusive, sustainable and meaningful place for everyone. As part of the design process, the architects and Barbican project team worked with two co-design groups made up of people aged 18-30 years old. Their insights and suggestions also helped inform the ambitious plans. A Grade II-listed architectural icon and one of the UK’s top 20 cultural attractions, the Barbican Centre attracted 1.54 million visitors last year alone. However, after 40 years of activity, the centre is in urgent need of upgrade. As part of the first phase of Renewal (2025-30), on top of significant and vital infrastructure work, the programme will deliver; - A fully accessible conservatory which will remain open to the public almost every day, with new water feature, and bold, theatrical planting - A rejuvenated lakeside terrace, complete with fully functioning fountains, rich new landscaping, climate-friendly planting, improved seating and lighting - Flexible, inclusive foyers, will bring the arts out into the heart of the centre and provide improved facilities for all so everyone can enjoy all the site has to offer The design team delivering the programme are led by architects Allies and Morrison working with Asif Khan Studio and engineers Buro Happold, lighting designers les éclaireurs, inclusive design advisors, Arup, circular economy experts, Reusefully, and landscape designers Harris Bugg Studio. The City of London Corporation has committed £191 million to fund 80% of this first phase of works. A big focus now is on fundraising to secure the remaining support needed to deliver the full programme. Subject to planning approval, construction is expected to begin in 2027, with the first phase due for completion in 2030, just ahead of the Barbican’s 50th anniversary in 2032. Members of the public are invited to view the new designs and share feedback online or in person at the Barbican Centre. For more information, visit barbican.org.uk/renewal
6. <https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room/barbican-unveils-ambitious-renewal-plans-as-public-consultation-launches> - Landscape designers Harris Bugg Studio have been appointed to reimagine the Conservatory planting scheme. Oliver Heywood, Director at Allies and Morrison, said: “The Barbican is one of London’s most iconic spaces. Our goal is to honour the Centre’s original bold architectural legacy, while making it more inclusive, sustainable, and fit for the future.” Feedback from this consultation will inform the next stage of plans, set to be unveiled in May 2025. The process has already engaged public and key stakeholders through extensive co-design and consultation. Subject to planning permission, construction will begin in 2027 with this first phase complete in time for the Barbican’s 50th anniversary in 2032. Further phases will focus on renovating and modernising other parts of the site, unlocking underused spaces and improving accessibility. The Renewal programme is supported by a £191 million contribution from the City of London Corporation which represents 80% of what’s needed for the first five-year phase of works. A major fundraising campaign will be launched later this year to fully secure the centre’s future. For more information about the Barbican Renewal programme and how to participate in the consultation, visit www.barbican.org.uk/renewal.