

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

East Road Building

Design & Access Statement

11.04.2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Vision Statement

Established in 1753, the British Museum is a globally renowned institution with incomparable collections. Free to enter from the beginning, it attracts around six million visitors annually and is an integral part of the nation's and the world's cultural life.

The Museum tells the story of two million years of human life, from prehistory to the present. As it sets an ambitious course for the future, the Museum is seizing the opportunity to reinvigorate how it connects with people's lives through its collections and scholarship. This will involve re-imagining displays to give due representation to the many cultures, communities and histories of the world, illustrating their distinctiveness and their interconnections, all within the context of the story of our common humanity.

This holistic vision is set against the backdrop of a global climate crisis, and humanity's collective ambition to realise a Net Zero Carbon future. These challenges require an equally ambitious response in transitioning infrastructure from existing carbon intensive systems to low carbon solutions. Such transitions are complex when undertaken in the context of one of the nation's most historically significant heritage assets.

The East Road Building (ERB) will deliver a vital step towards achieving a sustainable future for the Museum Estate.



Right:

Portico and pediment tympanum, with sculpted figures depicting the progress of civilisation, overlooking the South Forecourt

Statement of Need

Current engineering infrastructure at the Museum has developed organically over time in response to changing needs as the Museum has expanded and altered over its lifetime. Existing heating systems are powered by natural gas, which alongside primary electrical systems, are at the end of their service life.

Collectively, existing infrastructure systems are not optimised to work efficiently together, and do not offer a viable pathway to a sustainable future for the Estate. The urgency of the climate crisis calls for prioritising the delivery of a programme of work which transitions the primary electrical and heating infrastructure of the Museum to less carbon intensive systems.

Sustainability is not of course solely about carbon emissions but also robustness, resilience, financial stability, and enabling future change. Like much of the heating system, parts of the Museum’s fire-safety and life-safety infrastructure is at the end of its service life, and requires replacement in order to improve the Museum’s capacity to respond to emergencies.

Similarly, some existing support accommodation is currently housed in poor quality and temporary type accommodations. These do not provide suitable facilities with regards to safety, accessibility and fitness for purpose for the people who keep the Museum open and operational for all to enjoy. In summary, this accommodation is not in keeping with the high regard in which maintenance staff are held by the British Museum as an institution.

The requirement to keep the Museum open and operational throughout the transition process necessitates a carefully phased approach to delivery.

The proposals illustrated within this application, therefore, present the first phase of a wider programme of delivery which will transition the Museum to low carbon sustainable systems, replace critical life-safety infrastructure, and provide adequate facilities for the maintenance and up-keep of the Museum.

This in turn will enable the wider curatorial and masterplan vision to develop over time from a genuinely sustainable foundation.



Right:
Detailed photographs of the
pediment tympanum overlooking
the South Forecourt

Purpose and Content of this Document

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared by Wright & Wright Architects on behalf of the British Museum, and is submitted in support of an application for full planning permission and listed building consent. It should be read in conjunction with the other documents (reports and drawings) submitted in support of the planning and listed building consent application.

The document describes, with supporting images, illustrations, drawings, and photographs, the analysis and considerations made in developing the design concept, detail, and provisions made for access.

Site and context

Chapter 1 describes the wider urban and planning context before analysing the existing site and buildings, noting their features, character and qualities which present both constraints and opportunities. In summary, the proposals do not lie within key views identified within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy (2011), but do lie within the back-of-house and servicing setting of the Museum buildings, some of which are of very high interest.

The immediate local context of the site is characterised largely by its back-of-house function. The post-war buildings proposed for demolition, namely the existing East Road Building and Green Huts, are of no architectural or historic value. As a group they may even be considered as detracting elements within the setting of the surrounding listed buildings. Additionally, they are either temporary structures, or present limitations with regards to

useable area, level access, and suitable arrangements for plant ventilation and replacement. These existing buildings occupy an area fronting onto an internal servicing road (known as the East Road). Fronting the other side of the East Road is the East Wing and north east corner of the Grade I Listed Smirke Quadrangle, which contains predominantly plant accommodation at road level, with gallery space occupying the levels above.

Situated to the site's east and south are the rear elevations of a series of Grade II listed Georgian terraces, known as the 'perimeter properties', from No. 7 Montague Street to No. 41 Russell Square. These rear elevations and associated gardens have, to varying degrees, undergone considerable change over time, through the expansion of the Museum Estate and rear extensions to the perimeter property basements and ground floor envelopes. The rear courtyard and garden spaces also house some mature trees, which have been given due consideration in developing the proposals.

The site's location adjacent to the service road also brings constraints with regards to servicing and relocation of services distribution, which currently run beneath the road's ground level. The design proposals have been calculated to minimise disruption to the logistics and operations of the Museum, and work in tandem with existing estate wide servicing strategies.

Brief

Chapter 2 summarises the core requirement of the project brief which the proposals seek to deliver.

It firstly describes how the proposals detailed within this planning application form only a part of a wider strategic vision for the Museum Estate's sustainable infrastructure, to be delivered over time through a series of phases in order to keep the Museum open and operational throughout delivery.

It then provides a description of both the engineering infrastructure and support space brief as they apply to the proposed East Road Building detailed within this document. Lastly, key briefing requirements regarding sustainability and accessibility are noted.

Consultation and scheme development

The proposals seek to manage a complex range of sensitivities, and the range of stakeholders concerned with this project was comprehensively mapped out at an early stage. Strong relationships have been established with various statutory bodies, interest groups, and internal Museum stakeholders through extensive discussions and the well-informed development of relevant documents.

At every stage, the design has been developed in collaboration with stakeholders and consultees, which has without a doubt contributed to the building's sensitive response to context, proposed materiality and detail, and robust approach to resilience, sustainability, and future proofing.

The consultation undertaken and resulting scheme development is summarised further in Chapter 3.

Proposals

Chapter 4 firstly explains the core design principles and concepts which have informed the development's scope, use, and architectural design intent. It also describes and illustrates the proposals with regards to bulk, scale and massing, use, layout and general arrangement, materiality and elevational detail, as well as technical aspects such as sustainability, ecology, acoustics, and servicing. This includes reflection as to how the proposed design responds to the local context and setting of the site, including how the historical and architectural importance of significant aspects of built heritage and setting have been considered.

In summary, the existing East Road Building (ERB) will be replaced with a new contemporary piece of architecture aligned with the Museum's current and future needs that is also in keeping with the local context.

The proposals illustrate a new three-storey building comprised of basement, ground, and part first floor including associated works to provide plant and welfare accommodation ancillary to the Museum. This will sit within the footprint of the existing ERB and western line of its external ramps and stairs. In terms of both character and scale, the proposals are consistent with the existing character of the setting.

The proposed building will deliver critical upgrades required to enable a sustainable infrastructure transition across the Estate, as well as replace aged life-safety and fire-safety infrastructure serving the wider Museum. In doing so, it will make a critical contribution to ensuring the Museum is able to reduce and mitigate the risk of harm to its built heritage and collections.

In addition, the proposals will also replace workshop functions, which are vital in supporting the operation and maintenance of the Museum. These functions are currently housed in temporary portacabins or poor quality existing buildings, which present obvious limitations with regards to health and wellbeing, access, design quality and general suitability for purpose.

The materiality and detail of the proposals has been developed with scrupulous regard for the sensitivities of historic Museum fabric and the setting of listed assets to ensure the proposals are delivered without harm to the existing Museum building or the setting of neighbouring buildings.

The replacement of poor quality existing accommodation with high quality architecture, contextual in both character and scale, will improve the overall visual and environmental quality of the north east part of the Estate. The proposals are considered to not materially affect the way in which the significance of the listed properties are experienced and appreciated, nor is any harm identified as being done to the Conservation Area.

Technical design aspects such as sustainability, ecology, fire, drainage and acoustics have also been given due regard in developing the design to ensure that the requirements of Camden planning policy and also the Museum are met. This ensures the proposals are technically robust and resilient as well as aesthetically well resolved.

INTRODUCTION

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared by Wright & Wright Architects on behalf of the British Museum, and is for a full planning application and listed-building consent. It should be read in conjunction with the other documents (reports and drawings) submitted in support of the planning application.

The proposals have been developed by a consultant team including:

- Wright & Wright (Architect)
- Steensen Varming (MEP Engineer, External Lighting, Sustainability, Principal Designer)
- Alan Baxters Ltd (Structural and Civil Engineers)
- Stace (Project Manager)
- Gardiner & Theobald (Cost Consultant)
- Real PM (Construction Programming)
- Montagu Evans (Planning & Heritage Consultant)
- Concilio (Public Relations Consultant)
- ARUP (Fire Safety Engineering)
- David Bonnett Associates (Equality & Accessibility Consultant)
- Writtle Forest Consultancy (Ecology and Arboriculture)
- Pre-Construct Archaeology (Archaeological Consultant)
- Gordon Ingram Associates (Daylight/Sunlight Surveyor)
- AIS (Approved Inspector)

The development site (illustrated on the following page) sits within the north east corner of the Grade I Listed British Museum on the Bloomsbury Estate. This area is characterised by its back-of-house servicing use and is not accessible to the public. The site is bounded by the rear elevation of the Museum's East Wing and an external servicing road (the East Road) to the west; the rear elevations of Grade II Listed Georgian terraces to the east; the rear garden and late 20th century extension of No. 7 Montague Street to the south, and the King Edward Building and external servicing gate (North-East Gate) to the north.

The site is currently occupied by an existing single-storey late 20th century structure known as the East Road Building (ERB). It is of no architectural value nor interest and has a raised ground floor level, making it unsuitable for uses which require level access as well as plant maintenance and replacement. Directly north of this sits a two-storey utilitarian structure known as the 'Green Huts'. This temporary structure is in very poor condition, and is a detracting element within the overall setting.

The proposals include the demolition of this poor quality and compromised accommodation and their replacement with new contemporary architecture which is in keeping with the local context.

The new building will deliver a small amount of workshop accommodation, which is vital in supporting the maintenance of the wider Estate, but the majority of the space will house upgraded infrastructure.

This new building will therefore:

- Contribute to the primary electrical system upgrades required to support the longer term transition to sustainable infrastructure for the entire Estate
- Replace aged life-safety and fire-safety infrastructure, including sprinkler tanks, pumps and electrical generators and
- Provide fit-for-purpose modern workshop accommodation for key functions supporting the maintenance of the Museum.



In doing so, the proposals will deliver a critical step in realising the Museum’s wider vision of a sustainable future by:

1. Reducing and mitigating critical risks of harm to people, buildings and collection, and of service failure, leading to localised or complete closure of the Museum
2. Supporting delivery of the Government’s commitment to Net Zero
3. Avoiding an unaffordable rise in maintenance costs associated with ageing and life-expired infrastructure
4. Enabling sustainable future development of the Museum.

As this document will illustrate, the proposed building has been carefully considered, not only in how it responds to the character and context of its setting, but also how it can make positive steps towards a more sustainable future for the Museum.

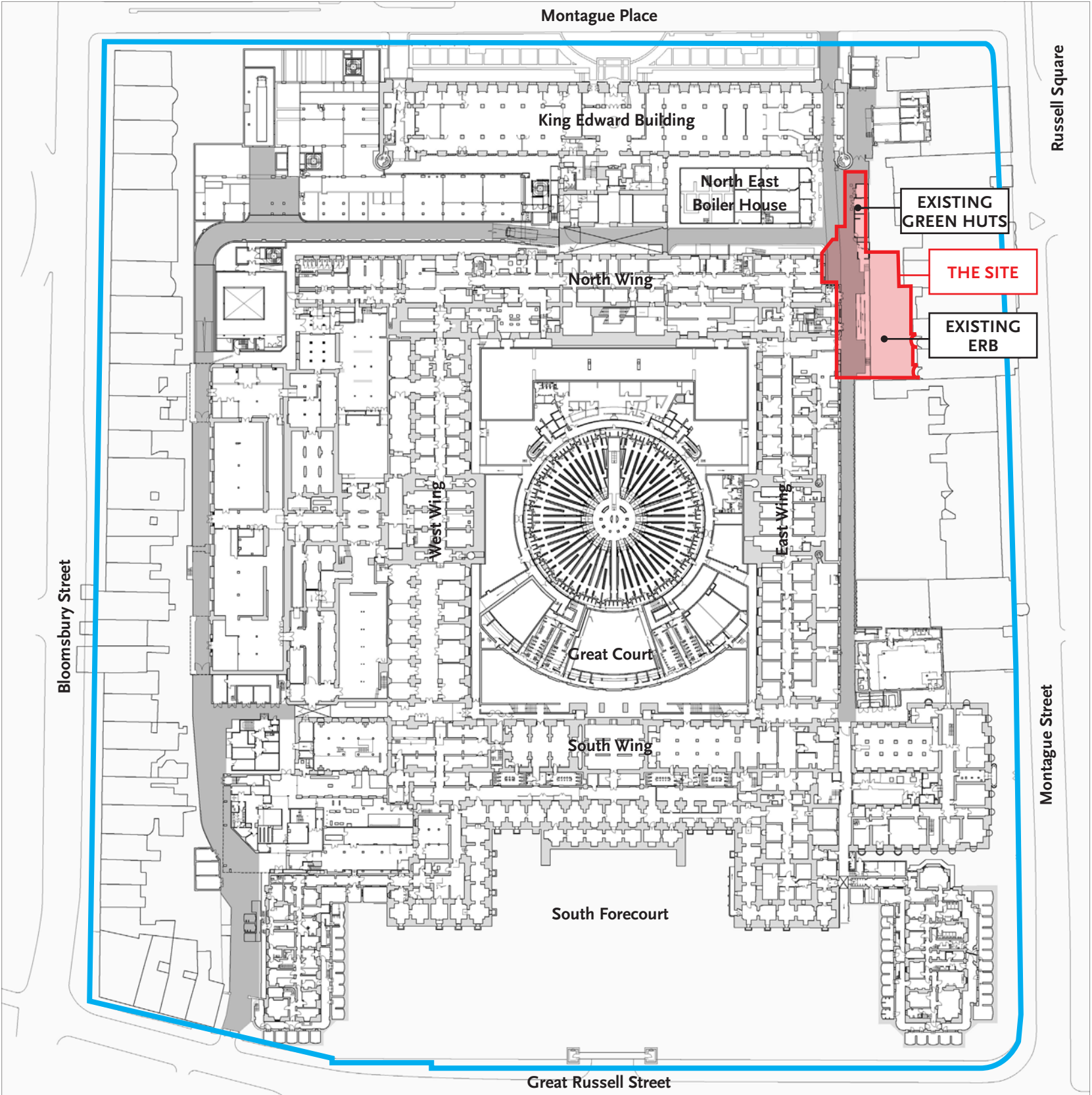


Key:

-  Proposed development site boundary
-  Boundary of wider Museum Estate within applicants ownership

Right:

Level 02 plan of the Museum Estate showing the location of the development site and relevant existing buildings



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