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BRITISH MUSEUM
TEMPORARY SOUTH BAG SEARCH FACILITY

BRITISH MUSEUM

Heritage Statement
MARCH 2025

683-DJA-RP-A-10002-HS_issued April 2025.



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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Heritage statement is to be read in conjunction with the Design and Access Statement. This statement has been prepared by Dannatt Johnson Architects on behalf of the British Museum. It supports a new planning application and listed building consent required to be submitted to enable the existing South bag search facility to temporarily move to a new location in the South forecourt. The current approved planning for its current location will expire in September 2026.

This report reviews the existing context, proposals and temporary impact of the bag search facility in relation to the significance of the heritage context in which the South bag search facility is proposed to be positioned.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Site Summary and context

The British Museum was founded in 1753, and is located in Bloomsbury, London. The Museum holds one of the world's greatest anthropology collections of human history, culture, and art with approximately 8 million objects in the permanent collection. The Museum is the United Kingdom's most visited cultural attraction with circa 6 million visitors per year.

The 100,000 square-metre site in Bloomsbury houses the Museum's key activities of curating, displaying and caring for the collection. The Museum is constantly adapting, and since its inception, building work in the form of alterations, extension, reordering the collection and fabric repairs have been undertaken on an almost continuous basis.

The British Museum Bloomsbury site occupies a site bounded by Montague Place to the North, Montague Street to the East, Great Russell Street to the South and Bloomsbury Street to the West. The main entrance to the site is from Great Russell Street. The Museum building is Grade I listed and embedded within the Bloomsbury Conservation area in Central London. Refer appendix A for Historic England listing entries relevant to the site.

Despite the overall footprint to which the Museum site has evolved, the physical setting is relatively restrained. Only the north and south elevations front directly to the road. The east and west sides face onto the rears of terraced houses and are almost entirely concealed from view. It is surrounded on all sides, by buildings and registered parks that are of significant historical and architectural importance.

As stated in the Conservation Management Plan (CMP February 2023 issue by Purcell) “..The original street pattern is retained in most part, but 20th century development has involved the loss of some earlier, small-scale domestic terraces. In most cases, later buildings maintain and define street frontages, despite their larger scale and increased bulk and mass. There are a series of pedestrianised spaces and courtyards of varying scales between the buildings giving a quieter but nonetheless active campus atmosphere contrasting with the busy streets”.

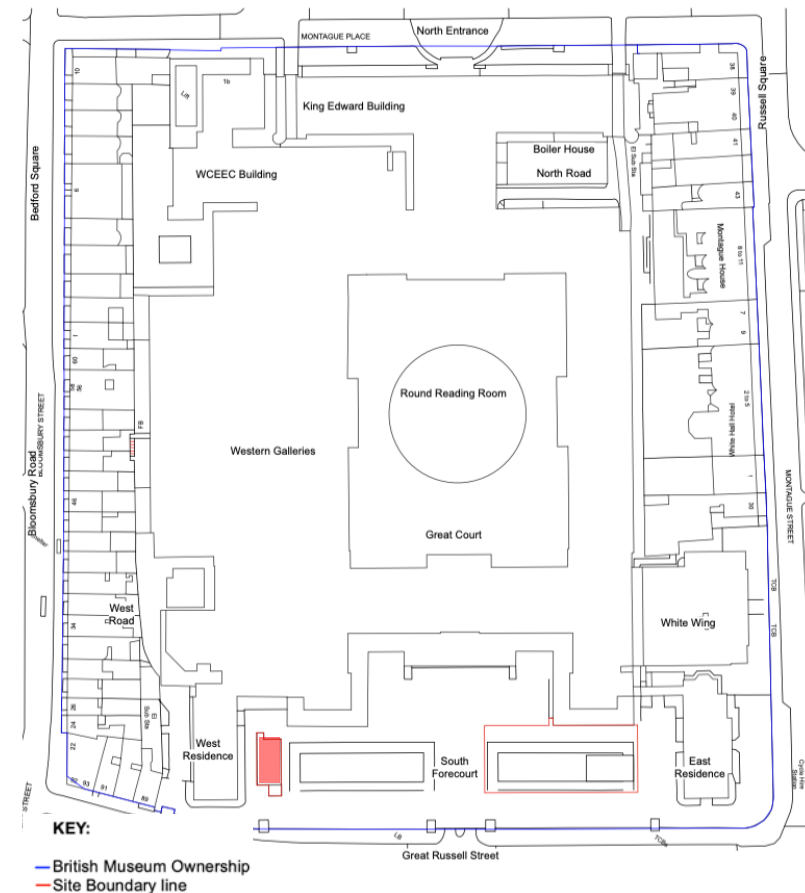


Image: Block plan of the British Museum Bloomsbury site, identifying the south bag search facility

Historic Development

The British Museum was established following the purchase of Montagu House, which was sought to accommodate a collection for the public, passed over from Sir Hans Sloane's prolific collection after his death in 1753. The collection grew rapidly from this point with numerous donations and gifts from private collections. The Museum's collection included a diverse range of artefacts including natural specimens, antiquities, books and ethnographic materials.

Refer to the below construction phase plans to follow how the site evolved between 1755 to 1925 to provide space for the growing collection.

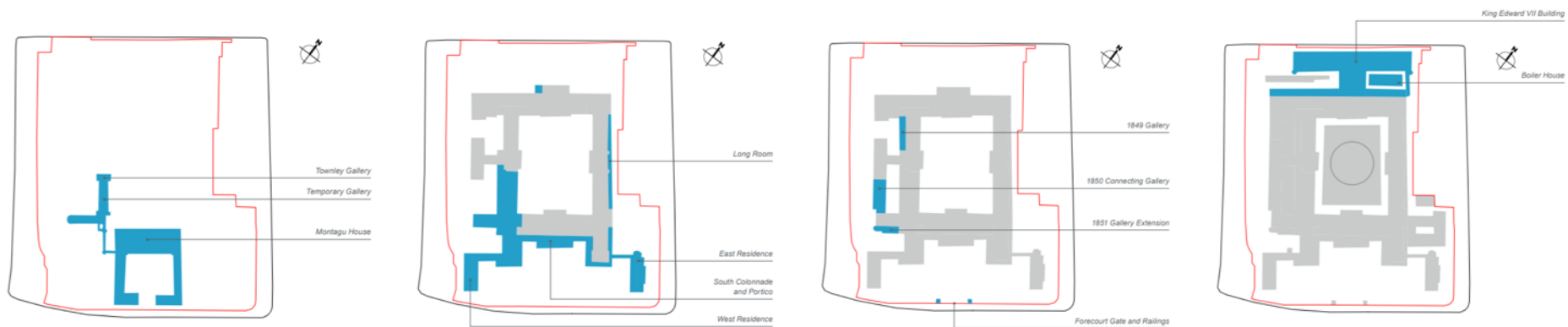


Image credit: Construction Phase 1 1755-1822 Montagu House, Townley Gallery and the Parthenon Sculptures. Pg. 23

"Montagu House was purchased to house the new British Museum collection in 1755. The building was U-shaped with a deep forecourt and designed in a French style".

Image credit: Construction Phase 4 1842-1848 South Colonnade, Portico, Residences, South West Wing and Long Room. Pg. 26

"The demolition of the remainder of Montagu House and the Townley Gallery in 1846 enabled the completion of the full quadrangle, as well as the construction of the south colonnade and portico".

Image credit: Construction Phase 5 1849-1852 West Wing extension and Great Russell Street forecourt. Pg. 27

"The forecourt, railings and gates along Great Russell Street were completed in 1850, with gas lamps added in 1853".

Image credit: Construction Phase 8 1899-1925 King Edward VII Galleries. Pg. 30

"The Museum acquired the freehold of the properties around its periphery in the 1890's, meaning that it could start extending beyond its original boundary. The King Edward VII building was built between 1906 and 1914 across the north side of the Museum.."

Summary of the proposals

The South bag search facility is an existing temporary structure currently located in the South Forecourt. Alongside the bag search facility located at the North entrance on Montague Place, it provides bag search facilities for all visitors arriving to the British Museum. It is proposed to temporarily relocate the search facility in the South Forecourt from its existing position on the west to be located on the east lawn. This will enable the construction of the interim pavilion and other planned works in the Forecourt. Further detail for the sequence of works is outlined in the accompanying Design and Access Statement, section 3.0.

The South bag search facility structure is temporary and this is reflected in its material composition of soft vinyl sheet roofing and rigid panel wall system to the elevations. Refer to the Architectural Drawings in Appendix A of the supporting Design and Access statement for additional detail.

Appendix A: Architectural Drawings

683-DJA-DR-A-11001	Location Plan	P05
683-DJA-DR-A-11008	Existing Block plan	P01
683-DJA-DR-A-11002	Proposed Block Plan	P05
683-DJA-DR-A-11003	Existing South (West) Forecourt Plan	P03
683-DJA-DR-A-11004	Proposed South (East) Forecourt Plan	P04
683-DJA-DR-A-11005	Proposed South (West) Forecourt Plan	P01
683-DJA-DR-A-11006	Existing South (East) Forecourt Plan	P01
683-DJA-DR-A-20001	Existing South (West) Forecourt Demolition Plan	P02
683-DJA-DR-A-20002	Existing South (East) Forecourt Demolition Plan	P01
683-DJA-DR-A-20003	Dwarf wall demolition detail	P01
683-DJA-DR-A-20004	Dwarf wall proposed detail	P01
683-DJA-DR-A-30001	Existing South Forecourt Elevations 1	P02
683-DJA-DR-A-30002	Existing South Forecourt Elevations 2	P02
683-DJA-DR-A-31001	Proposed South Forecourt Elevations 1	P02
683-DJA-DR-A-31002	Proposed South Forecourt Elevations 2	P02
683-DJA-DR-A-32000	Proposed South Forecourt Sections	P02
683-DJA-DR-A-32001	Proposed South Forecourt Sections	P02
683-DJA-RP-A-10002-DAS	Design and Access Statement	



Image: Existing view looking west towards existing South Bag Search facility.

3.0 LEGISLATION AND PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

Planning policies for the site are contained within a number of planning policies and legislation. Including Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (S16, S66 and S72), Camden Local Plan 2017, Camden local Plan open space (Policy A2, site no.11) Local Plan Central London Area, National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) December 2024, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas and Historic England guidance. Any new proposals will be considered having regard to the particular needs and opportunities of the site. These proposals must be complementary to the character, vitality, and sustainability of the site.

The site is part of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. Important views and vistas are considered, relating to the views of the bag search facilities within the setting of a significant site. Assessment has been informed by the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy Adopted (this is an older document only issued as a draft on 18 April 2011).

The significance of the British Museum building and setting is high, there are a number of other listed buildings that surround the Grade I listed building. Refer to appended Historic England listing entries relevant to the British Museum.

4.0 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

South Bag Search Facility, South Forecourt

The South Forecourt dates from 1846 and is the British Museum's public and main approach to the entrance of the Museum, the forecourt is a central open external yorkstone and stone sett paved court accessed from Great Russell Street to the south. In terms of significance, the 2023 CMP includes the following commentary:

'The south forecourt forms a very highly significant part of the British Museum's immediate setting, framing the building within the streetscape and emphasising its status (and by extension, the status of the collection within).'

The south colonnade, portico, east and west residences and railings along Great Russell Street are all considered to be of very high significance.

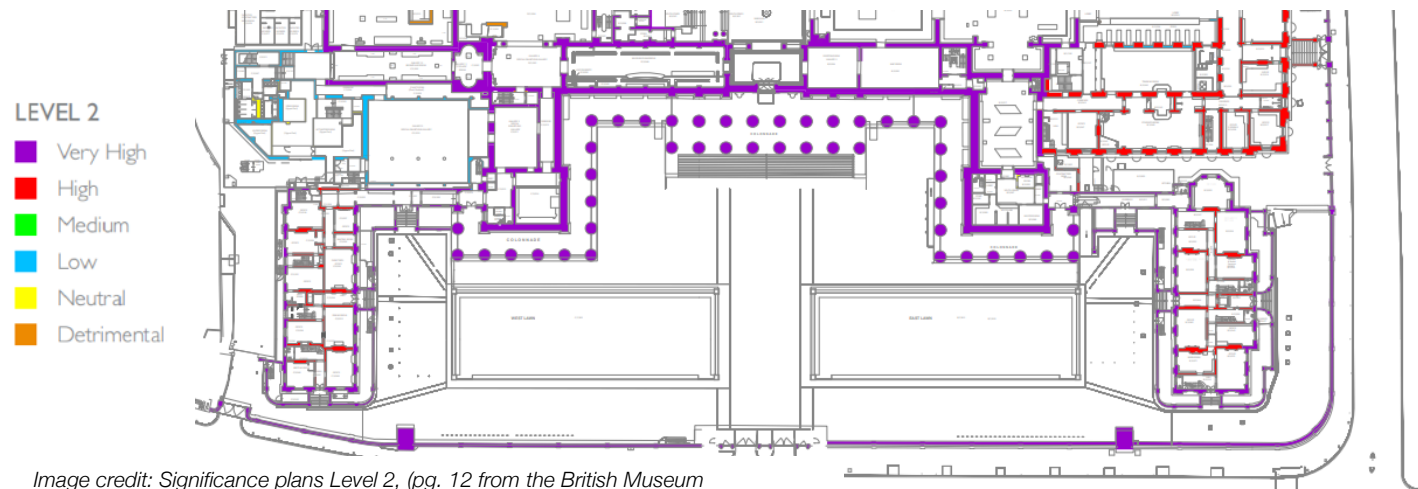


Image credit: Significance plans Level 2, (pg. 12 from the British Museum Conservation Management Plan issued February 2023 by Purcell).

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSALS

The British Museum is a cultural institution of international importance, occupying a major ensemble of outstanding grade I listed buildings which make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of this the Conservation Area as a whole.

The position of the South bag search facility is proposed to temporarily move to the East Lawn within the South forecourt. This is to accommodate other planned activities in the forecourt as part of the Museum's wider programme to enhance the visitor welcome and continue to provide quality security screening provision. It is proposed the South bag search facility will be in this location for less than a year and remains temporary. Extensive site analysis and location options appraisal were completed to identify the most appropriate position for the temporary location of the South bag search facility.

To accommodate the exit ramp on the north side of the proposed structure and to keep the footprint within the East lawn, it will be necessary to temporarily remove a section of the existing dwarf wall. The layout of the forecourt with grassed lawns bounded by dwarf walls and stone sett perimeters are still as shown in Sidney Smirke's 1850 plans, however they have been rebuilt and remodelled latterly by Lord Foster's work to the Great court in 2000. The exact date of the existing walling is not certain, but they may have been replaced during refurbishment works between 1998 and 2000 before the opening of the Great Court. The walling is not specifically listed but is within the curtilage of a significant heritage asset forming part of the British Museum building estate.

Permission is sought to enable the removal of a section of the dwarf walling to provide a suitable exit route from the bag search facility as per the proposal. It is intended that any wall material or stone is carefully removed as part of this work, retained and appropriately stored elsewhere on site whilst the bag search facility is in this position. The dwarf wall can then be re-built and the stones reinstated in their original locations following the decommissioning of the temporary building.

Further detail can be found in the Design and Access statement and accompanying Appendices.

We have made an evaluation of the temporary impact of the proposals in this application as interventions to the function, form and fabric of the Museum. The following matrix has been designed to summarise our opinion in relation to the extent of harm that the proposals may have on the heritage asset. The NPPF section 16 (paragraphs 212 to 221) has assisted in preparing the parameters of the matrix.

The grades used to define the level of impact are as follows:

1	Positive Overall neutral/minor impact
2	Moderate impact
3	Major impact
4	Impact to be determined

	Overall impact	Form	Function	Fabric
South Bag Search Facility	2	3	1	2

We have calculated that the new position for the South bag search facility imposes 'moderate impact' on the British Museum, with a resulting figure of 2. The greatest impact is to the form, as the facilities are located within the setting of a significant listed building. Additionally, the fabric is impacted by the small area of works required to the dwarf walling in the north east corner to accommodate the exit ramp. The perimeter lawn walls are not listed but sit within a highly significant heritage change to curtilage. The fabric of these walls are contemporary, having been rebuilt after 1998.

The new position for the bag search facility will have less than substantial harm on the function to the listed building and its change to curtilage. This impact will be temporary and reversed when the building is decommissioned. Any impact or harm to the fabric is outweighed by the benefit of public and visitor safety by providing an essential security procedure upon entry to the Museum. By temporarily relocating the bag search facility to the new position, there will also be a reduction in potential harm to visitors arriving via the bag search facility as the new position will be further away from the construction sites required for the build of the South West Energy Centre and subsequent build of the interim pavilion.

Impact on Streetscape

The South bag search facility is proposed to move from the west side of the South forecourt to the East Lawn. The structure will be visible from Great Russell Street; however, it is obscured by the perimeter railings and the colour of the tent material is light coloured and complimentary to the Portland stone of the British Museum façade.

The proposed position for the south bag search facility sits behind the Museum railings, in front of the portico and sits parallel to Great Russell Street. The bag search facility sits away from the main entrance gate to the South Forecourt. Looking from Great Russell Street, the structure does not impose on the views of the main Portico, East and West Wing projections. These are the elements which together comprise the Museum's most significant façade. The proposed position partially obscures the view to the east corner junction of the South Colonnade. However, due to the scale of the facility, the overall height of the tent does not protrude much above the Colonnade plinth. When standing in the South Forecourt looking east towards the Pavilion, it partially obstructs the lower level and view of the East Residence.

Public benefit

The temporary bag search facility provides significant public benefit, including providing increased security for visitors and staff to the Museum, protection to the collection and protection of the Grade I listed building fabric.

The size and scale of the South bag search facility are relevant and proportionate to the specific risk profile relevant to the Museum. As outlined in the Design and Access statement, the British Museum has a wider strategy and future plans for the security and visitor experience to the museum which is currently in progress. The continued use of the South bag search facility is necessary to remain in the South forecourt until the Interim Pavilion is constructed. The anticipated operational date for the Interim Pavilion is Summer 2026. The retention of the facilities for a further temporary period is assessed to have a short-term moderate impact on the appreciation and special interest of the British Museum until reversed.



Image: Rendered visualisation of South bag search facility in proposed position on the East Lawn.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The South bag search facility is located within the setting of and adjacent to historic and listed fabric. It is situated in front of highly significant areas of the British Museum south entrance facade.

The structure is not attached to any parts of the listed and historic fabric and does not affect the longevity or safety of its existing composition.

The bag search facilities are temporary for a period of slightly over a year and will therefore have no long-term impact. We consider the position of the search facility to cause less than substantial harm on a temporary basis. There is no additional harm to the appreciation or the setting of the listed building as a result of the relocation of the facility. The provision of the relocated bag search facility provides a safe and essential security procedure for visitors upon entry to the Museum. By temporarily relocating the bag search facility to the new position, the management and health and safety risk for the visitors arriving to the Museum is further reduced as the public will be kept away from the new construction sites in the west of the Forecourt.

We understand that the Museum are engaged in a long-term strategy to develop and enhance the visual appearance of existing and future bag search facilities.

The proposed South bag search facility has a moderate but fully reversible impact on the heritage assets of the British Museum causing less than substantial harm and are proposed on a temporary basis. While in place there is limited harm to the appreciation or setting of the listed building as a result of the facility. They are required for public safety and the continued enjoyment of the Museum until they are replaced with an improved visitor experience and security facility as part of the British Museum's wider plans in the medium and long term.



Image: Rendered visualisation of South bag search facility, looking east from the centre of the South forecourt.

7.0 APPENDICES

Appendix A: Historic England listing entries

List entry number, 1322129

The British Museum King Edward VII Galleries and attached wall and lions, Montague Place

Museum gallery forming part of The British Museum (qv). 1905-14. By Sir John Burnet, assisted by Thomas Tait. Portland stone and marble. EXTERIOR: 2 storeys and semi-basement, 21 bays. Symmetrical Edwardian Beaux Arts facade with a screen of attached Ionic columns on a podium and flat, higher square erections at the angles. Commercial metal framed windows, on both floors, between the columns. Granite door frame with inner frame of enriched marble. Above this an inscribed foundation stone and gilded wreaths on the flanking columns. Cornice with protruding carved lions' heads at intervals. Deep blocking course with guttae at intervals and parapet above having, at intervals, carved crowns with the initials ER under. INTERIOR: in fine neo-Classical style. Low top-lit hall. Stair lined with Greek marble; a pair of black columns with a large Buddha between in the well and a gilt bronze lift cage to one side. Galleries in trabeated Smirke style; stripped Classical detailing. North Library, behind the stair, altered from Burnet's original mannerist concept. SUBSIDIARY FEATURES: attached stone wall to areas terminating at either side of the main entrance with carved stone lions, having crossed front paws, by Sir George Frampton.

List entry number, 1130404

The British Museum, Great Russell Street

Museum. 1823-47. By Sir Robert Smirke with later additions. Portland stone. Planned as a big quadrangle with open courtyard extending north from Montague House (the original museum, demolished c1840). 2 main storeys in Greek Revival style. Built in stages. East Wing 1823-26: built to house George IV's library and Angerstein pictures (later basis of National Gallery). An early use of iron beams clad in concrete by engineer John Rastrick. Fine Grecian detail to interior with scagliola walls. West Wing 1831-4: built to house antiquities. Redecorated to Smirke's original colour scheme 1980. North Wing 1833-8: built to house antiquities. South Range 1842-7: built as the principal facade following the demolition of Montague House. 7-bay centre linked to projecting wings. Ionic octastyle portico with sculptured pediment projecting from

a massive colonnade running around the wings. Ionic order from the temple of Athene Polias, Priene. Pediment sculpture depicts the "Progress of Civilisation" by Westmacott. Fine interior with grand central staircase. Round Reading Room 1852-7: by Sydney Smirke. Erected to fill the open quadrangle, with domed cast-iron roof. HISTORICAL NOTE: the museum expanded north during the C19, the last main addition being the King Edward VII Gallery (qv), 1914, facing Montague Place. Some of the galleries were damaged during World War II and have been remodelled for display purposes.

List entry number, 1130406

Main entrance gateway, railings & attached lodges to the British Museum

Main entrance gateway, railings & porters lodges. 1849. By Sydney Smirke. Cast-iron and granite. Large, elaborate, cast-iron double vehicle entrance gates flanked by single footgates. Engaged, fluted and foliated Corinthian columns, and pilasters, to piers surmounted by urns. Main piers of granite containing small porters' lodges with plain square-headed entrances. Elaborate cast-iron railings on granite plinth with granite interval piers, the standards in the form of candelabra on bases with clawed feet.

List entry number, 1130405

Eighteen lamp posts on the forecourt of the British Museum

18 lamp posts. Mid C19. Elaborate cast-iron lamp posts of Rochester type with ladder bars. On stone plinths, the 4 opposite the portico having 3 globes each.

Appendix B: Previous planning and listed building consents in relation to the South Forecourt

<https://planningrecords.camden.gov.uk>

Application Number: P9600014R2
Date submitted: 09-09-1996

Proposal: Demolition of the quadrant bookstacks and rear section of the front entrance hall. Erection of new accommodation in the Great Court to provide galleries, education centre, retail and restaurants ancillary to the museum under a new glazed roof. Restoration and upgrading of the Round Reading Room for use as an information centre for the museum. Works of alteration and landscaping to the forecourt including removal of existing car parking, as shown on drawing numbers SNFP/828/ 600, 601A, 602A, 603A, 604, 605, 606, 607A, 608A, 609A, 610A, 611A, 612A, 613A, 614A, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620A, 621A, 622A, 623A, 625, 3 unnumbered A4 drawings titled 'Roof Setting Out'; Report on Round Reading Room dated April 1996, Design Strategy report April 1996, Archaeological Report. Drawing SNFP/828/ 724 submitted for information only.

Application Number: L9600015R2
Date submitted: 09-09-1996

Proposal: Demolition of the quadrant bookstacks and rear section of the accommodation in the Great Court to provide galleries, education centre, retail and restaurants ancillary to the museum under a new glazed roof. Restoration and upgrading of the Round Reading Room for use as an information centre for the museum. Works of alteration and landscaping to the forecourt including removal of existing car parking, as shown on drawing numbers SNFP/828/600, 601A, 602A, 603A, 604, 605, 606, 607A, 608A, 609A, 610A, 611A, 612A, 613A, 614A, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620A, 621A, 622A, 623A, 625, 3 unnumbered A4 drawings titled 'Roof Setting Out'; Report on Round Reading Room dated April 1996, Design Strategy report April 1996, Archaeological Report. Drawing SNFP/828/ 724 submitted for information only.