

VISITOR CATERING SERVICES NEW COUNTERS - EASTERN ELEVATION THE GREAT COURT THE BRITISH MUSEUM

HERITAGE IMPACT STATEMENT

Context

This proposed installation relates to the relocation of existing catering services in The Great Court of the British Museum. The works will involve the removal of existing counters to the north eastern elevation and replacement by new servery counter along the eastern elevation of The Great Court.

The existing counters on to the north west elevation are due to be removed in January 2014 as part of the development of the new entrance to the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre (WCEC).

Background

In response to our Listed Building and Conservation consent applications, we have been asked by Camden Planning to submit a statement describing any heritage assets affected by the proposals.

We have referred to the British Museum's *Conservation Plan* which deals specifically section 5.7 which documents 'The Round Reading Room and the Great Court 1854-57 - Sector G' which was updated in 2007. Much of the document relates in the main to the Round Reading Room that sits within The Great Court.

Heritage Impact

The Great Court remained largely unchanged from Smirke's original design in the 1850s until it was altered substantially in the late 1990s by Sir Norman Foster when the glass roof was added as was the the oval surround to the Round Reading Room. The original Smirke facades have all been retained within The Great Court as part of the Foster scheme.

With regards to The Great Court, the Conservation Plan cites that:

While the Great Court remains an open space, as yet without a definite purpose, more uses are being established. The northeast and northwest corners house the Court Café...

It is within this space created, in the main by Fosters and Partners in the early 2000s, that the new counter is to be located. The north west counters are due to be removed in January 2014 in order to facilitate the entrance to the WCEC from The Great Court. This will now break the symmetry of the counter arrangement in the NW and NE elevations.

The re-location of the counter from the north east to the eastern elevation is being proposed for operational (visitor flow through the space) and to all intents and purposes the new counter is of similar size, scale and finish as the existing counter.

Whilst, from our understanding of the Conservation Plan, there are no specific *Conservation Guidance* notes specifically relative to The Great Court, it does state:

It should be noted that the opening up of the Great Court has completely changed the circulation patterns in the Museum. The progression around the building has been replaced by traffic across the Great Court. This has not at present made the visitor route simple or more comprehensible.

More work will be needed to see this new space fully integrated into the visitors' experience of the collection. This may require changes to the routes through and around the Great Court (both horizontal and vertical) which will create a pressure for change to the fabric of the building.

The last sentence has been emboldened by us to highlight that the plan has identified that The Great Court is likely to be subject to organic change, require amendments and thinking to circulation routes in the future and thus one would naturally conclude to the layout of fixtures and fittings.

Significance

As the proposed counters sit within the main space of The Great Court they are set against Smirke's eastern facade of the court and on the modern floor installed in c2000 as part of the Foster and Partner's re-modeling of The Great Court.

It is to be noted that we are not proposing any physical intervention into the fabric of the building as noted in correspondence between Camden, ourselves, the British Museum and our previously submitted Design Statement. To this end we are not affecting any historical asset by way of physical intervention.

Where it is proposed to remove the existing counter in the North Eastern elevation, where floor penetrations and fixings have been made it is proposed to make good these holes by removing sections of tiling and replacing them with new by an approved contractor using stone sourced from the same quarry as the existing floor tiles. This will be subject to approval of their method statements and risk assessments.

The new counter is to be positioned 1500mm from the skirting detail of Smirke's eastern elevation and we do not therefore believe that it will affect the asset by way of aesthetic intervention due to its proximity away from the wall.

Conclusion

Given the context of the modern environment created by Fosters in the late 1990s for The Great Court and the juxtaposition of this against Smirke's original facades it is our opinion that the new counter follows the same design ethos already established for The Great Court. Additionally we are not proposing any physical intervention with the building fabric save for a removable services connection (as detailed in the Design Statement) via the existing floor trunking and services routes and therefore are making no significant impact or affecting the heritage assets within The Great Court.

Further, we have read the *Conservation Plan* relative the The Great Court and can advise we are abiding by their guidelines in so far as they relate to the The Great Court.