

Delegated Report		Analysis sheet		Expiry Date:	22/01/2007
		Members' Briefing		N/A / attached	Consultation Expiry Date:
Officer			Application Number(s)		
Elaine Quigley			(i) 2006/5451/P (ii) 2006/5455/L		
Application Address			Drawing Numbers		
South Stair, Central Saloon and Galleries 38 to 40 British Museum Great Russell Street London WC1B 3DG					
PO 3/4	Area Team Signature	C&UD	Authorised Officer Signature		
Proposal(s)					
(i) Refurbishment and replacement of existing roofs, including the installation of new external plant, refurbishment and restoration of original internal spaces, including new building services and internal plant spaces. (ii) Refurbishment and replacement of existing roofs, including the installation of new external plant, refurbishment and restoration of original internal spaces, including new building services and internal plant spaces.					
Recommendation(s):		(i) To grant planning permission subject to conditions (ii) To grant listed building consent subject to conditions			
Application Type:		Full Planning Permission Full Listed Building consent			

Conditions or Reasons for Refusal:	Refer to Draft Decision Notice					
Informatives:						
Consultations						
Adjoining Occupiers:	No. notified	00	No. of responses	01	No. of objections	01
			No. electronic	00		
Summary of consultation responses:	<p>Consultation No letters received as a result of the display of a site notice (expired 06/02/2007).</p> <p>English Heritage – comments If Local Authority is minded to grant listed building consent conditions should be attached.</p> <p>Government Office for London – no referral of the applications required.</p>					
CAAC/Local groups* comments: *Please Specify	<p>Bloomsbury CAAC – objections have been summarised in the points below</p> <p>(i) Treatment of interiors is not a true restoration of architectural features in accordance with Smirke's approach. This includes the incorrect position of the screen wall on top of step four rather than steps 3 and 4 and the resulting screen wall openings appearing too high.</p> <p><u>Council's comment's</u> <i>The proposed drawings indicate that the screen wall is to be located in the same position on steps 3 and 4. The height of the openings will match the others in the room, therefore they will not appear out of place.</i></p> <p>(ii) The proposed arrangement of three doorways on the north side of the south saloon is unacceptable as they are arbitrary in position as well as proportion and do not reflect Smirke's concept. Recommend the installation of two Doric columns that would be considered a more satisfactory arrangement.</p> <p><u>Council's comment's</u> <i>The suggestion of Doric columns do not form a part pf Smirke's original design. The installation of a solid wall with three openings represents an improvement on the current situation and would not upset the character of the room.</i></p> <p>(iii) Elaborate doorways into Galleries 38, 39, 40 would be inappropriate as there is no evidence that they were there in the first place. No objection to the new opening between Galleries 39 and 40 however the doorway should be on the side of Gallery 40.</p> <p><u>Council's comment's</u> <i>The relocation of the unframed door opening between Galleries 39 and 40 to a central position within gallery 39 would improve the circulation between the spaces and would work well with the symmetrical nature of the space.</i></p> <p>(iv) Proposed glass doors at both ends of Gallery 40 and 38 to accommodate new air conditioning would disfigure the rooms whether open or closed and would screen main elements of architectural interest within the rooms. The problem of climate control should be reconsidered and planned</p>					

over a larger area. Is a temporary solution possible?

Council's comment's

Although the doors will be visible within the long views from the South Stair they are not considered to be so obtrusive as to detract from this view, nor the appreciation of the sequence of room volumes. A condition would be attached to ensure that the detail is appropriate. Servicing would be incorporated within an existing void that would leave the main gallery spaces unaffected and would be considered appropriate.

Site Description

The application site is located on the west of Great Russell Street and comprises the British Museum that is a Grade I Listed Building. The application relates specifically to the a programme of gallery refurbishment and restoration within the South Stair, Central Saloon and galleries 37-40. The Central Saloon and galleries are situated at first floor level within the south wing and were designed by Smirke in 1847. The area of roof extends from behind the existing entrance colonnade to the eaves of the domed roof of the Great Hall

The surrounding street is characterised by specialty retail shops and A3 uses with residential flats along Great Russell Street and Bloomsbury Street. The site is located within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

Relevant History

The British Museum has an extensive planning history. The most relevant applications are listed below.

2006/5448/P

Planning permission is sought for the erection of temporary site compound, lifting hoist, temporary access staircase, roof mounted hoardings, platforms and temporary roofs in connection with construction works. The application expired on 22/01/2007 and is pending consideration.

2006/5450/L

Listed building consent is sought for the alterations in connection with the erection of temporary site compound, lifting hoist, temporary access staircase, roof mounted hoardings, platforms and temporary roofs in connection with construction works. The application expired on 22/01/2007 and is pending consideration.

Relevant policies

Adopted Unitary Development Plan 2006

B1 'General design principles', B3 'Alterations and extensions', B6 'Listed buildings', B7 'Conservation areas', SD6 'Amenity for occupiers and neighbours', SD7B 'Noise and vibration pollution', SD8 'Disturbance from plant and machinery', Appendix 1 'Noise and vibration thresholds'.

Camden Planning Guidance (Adopted December 2006)

'Conservation areas', 'Listed buildings', 'Noise and vibration', 'Roofs and terraces',

Assessment

Planning and listed building consent is sought for the refurbishment and replacement of existing roofs, including the installation of new external plant, refurbishment and restoration of original internal spaces, including new building services and internal plant spaces. A programme of gallery refurbishment and restoration within the South Stair, Central Saloon and galleries 37 – 40 is proposed. The Central Saloon and galleries are situated at first floor level within the south wing, and were designed by Smirke in 1847.

These areas of the Museum suffered bomb damage in the 1940s. The proposal seeks to resolve unsympathetic post war repairs and alterations, and 1990s alterations associated with the Great Court scheme, where partitioning was introduced into galleries 38 – 40. This is in line with the aims of the Museum's Conservation Plan.

The spatial hierarchy and relationship between the rooms has been disturbed with the loss of the Smirke-designed historic screen between the South Stair and Central Saloon, and the introduction of partitioning with the gallery spaces.

PLANNING ISSUES

Replacement roof and roof lanterns

It is proposed to remove the existing roof structure and finishes above the South Stair, Central Saloon

and Gallery 40. The section of the roof to be replaced extends from behind the existing entrance colonnade to the eaves of the roof of the Great Hall. Public views of this part of the roof of the building are limited. The existing structures would be replaced with a new shallow pitched copper roof and new roof lanterns. An external plant well would be located centrally within the central saloon roof. The new roof over galleries 37, 38, 39 would be 0.2m higher than the existing roof and would not have a detrimental impact on the character or appearance of the conservation area. The modern plastic corrugated roof above the Central Saloon, South Stair and gallery 40 would be replaced by a copper pitched roof and 6 no. new roof lanterns of varying sizes. The highest roof lantern would sit 0.5m above the existing corrugated roof. This would not be considered harmful to the character and appearance of the conservation area and would be considered acceptable.

Plant room/smoke extract ducts

It is proposed to locate new plant on the roof of gallery 40. This would include the installation of 2 no. externally mounted condenser units that will provide heat rejection for the air handling unit cooling coil. These condenser units will be located in a plant well that is located centrally within this area of the roof with the sides of the well enclosure projecting above the top of the condenser units. It would not be visible from the public domain and would be considered acceptable.

It is also proposed to install new smoke extract ducts over part of the roof of the South Stair. This would not project above the new roof structure and would be considered acceptable.

Amenity

The closest residential properties to this part of the Museum are properties fronting Great Russell Street and Bloomsbury Street. These properties are located approximately 100m from the front elevation of the British Museum. An acoustic report has been submitted with the application. Environmental Health has confirmed that there would be no objection to the proposal providing the standard conditions are attached.

LISTED BUILDING ISSUES

Central Saloon & South Stair incl. screen, ceilings & roofs

The roofs of the Central Saloon and the South Stair, including the lantern lights and coffered ceilings, were lost following war damage. Above the South Stair this was replaced with one single lantern. The Central Saloon ceiling was replaced with modern ceiling tiles, entirely omitting any natural light. A plant room is positioned above this, and is covered by corrugated glass fibre.

It is proposed to replace the Central Saloon roof and ceiling, reinstating the original neo-Classical decorative scheme of coffers and downstand beams with a traditional lantern light above, thus reinstating natural light to the space.

Above the South Stair it is proposed to replace the non-original lantern, and to reinstate the downstand beams which divide the light into three. These will be appropriately positioned on the line of the existing pilasters, and will be decorated to match the reinstated polychrome decorative scheme within the Stair (undertaken as part of the Great Court scheme).

Screen between South Stair and Central Saloon

Historic plans show there to be various permutations of a proposal for a dividing screen between the South Stair and Central Saloon, formed in circular, later square section, columns. Pre-war photographs show that this was in fact built as a screen wall with three framed openings. It is proposed to reinstate this screen, thus reinstating the spatial hierarchy and complete room volumes to either side. This is entirely in line with the Museum's Conservation Plan.

Screen between Central Saloon and South Portico

Doric columns were installed here when the northern extension to the Central Saloon was added in 1877. This was altered during the Great Court scheme, wherein a screen wall was inserted, with one centralised opening. The lifts are located behind this screen wall, which somewhat disconnects the

South Portico from the Central Saloon, and the resulting lobby has a rather utilitarian feel. It is proposed to replace this with a new screen wall which has three properly framed openings, to match those of the South Stair screen. This is considered acceptable as it will reconnect the two spaces more successfully than at present, and give some visual continuity to the Central Saloon itself.

Galleries 38 – 40

Galleries 38, 39 and 40 have been extensively subdivided with stud partitions, dropped ceilings, and mezzanine walkways, which form secure storage rooms and two corridors, giving access to the gallery 41 and the Botanical stair. This arrangement severely compromises the architectural integrity of these rooms, their relationship to one another and to the Central Saloon, and creates a confused and unclear route for visitors. This is especially the case within galleries 38 and 39 which have a back of house feel.

The removal of this partitioning and the reinstatement of the original room volumes and decorative treatment is welcomed.

Gallery 40

As with the Central Saloon, Gallery 40 has been much altered; it suffered extensive bomb damage, and has lost all of its original features, including the decorative coffered ceiling and roof lanterns. Archive photographs and plans indicate that the original ceiling was similar in decoration to the ceilings in galleries 37-39 and Central Saloon. The original design intention was to replicate the detail found in galleries 38/39, which retain their original ceilings, and to reinstate skirting to match that which remains in those galleries. The agent has advised that the existing moulding skirtings identified for retention in both Galleries 38 and 39, only exist in 39. The conclusion is that this is not original Smirke detail. It is proposed to reinstate the original wall treatment (no skirting) as in Galleries 36, 37 and 38. This would be considered acceptable. As with the Central Saloon, the corrugated glassfibre roof covering will be removed and traditional lantern lights installed, in this case three lanterns.

Archive photos and plans also indicate that there was a 'vestibule' arrangement at the western end of Gallery 40. This has since been lost but ducting is located in this position, with partitioning adjacent. It is necessary to incorporate plant within the gallery spaces and so it is proposed to reinstate a partition on the line of the previous vestibule, and incorporate servicing within the void, leaving the main gallery spaces unaffected.

As part of the need to incorporate environmental controls and fire protection within the gallery spaces, it is proposed to incorporate two new pairs of glazed doors, positioned adjacent to the retained historic doors, at both ends of the gallery. This will not have a detrimental impact on the retained historic fabric. Although the doors will be visible within the long views from the South Stair, they are not considered to be so obtrusive as to detract from this view, nor the appreciation of the sequence of room volumes. More detailed drawings are required, however, in order to ensure that the detail is appropriate.

Galleries 38 + 39

Beneath the inserted partitioning, these galleries retain their original features including decorative ceilings, which will be retained and restored, in particular, reinstating some coffer beams which have been lost from gallery 39.

There is an existing, unframed door opening between galleries 39 and 40, situated towards the eastern end of gallery 39. It is proposed to relocate this opening so that it is positioned centrally within gallery 39, which will work well with the symmetrical nature of the space, and will improve the circulation between the spaces.

Cast iron floor grilles will be replaced in facsimile where lost.

Floor treatments throughout

The modern floorcoverings will be removed and replaced with oak boarding, and new stone detailing will be installed at the base of the columns and around the perimeter of the Central Saloon, to match

the South Stair and gallery 37. This will provide visual continuity between the rooms.

Rooflights / roof repairs

The alterations to the roof, with the replacement of existing rooflights, will see the removal of unsympathetic later alterations and a general improvement in the roofscape, reintroducing lanterns in their original positions. The opportunity has been taken to install rooflights which, whilst sympathetic to the Smirke design intention, incorporate modern thermal performance and light attenuation, to suit the environmental requirements of the galleries below.

The alterations to the roofscape are considered to be appropriately detailed and are considered to be acceptable in listed building terms.

Conclusion

To summarise, the works proposed are considered to represent a significant improvement to these gallery spaces in terms of their function, performance, and the special architectural interest of this part of the building. Unsympathetic post-war alterations will be undone, reinstating the room volumes, floor plan, and significant spatial hierarchy and appreciation of this fine series of rooms.

The proposal does not purport to be a full-scale architectural restoration; modern gallery requirements such as fire regulation and environmental control dictate that modern elements (such as the glass doors) be installed. It is considered that this has been done in such a way as to minimise their effect on the historic spaces and overall architectural integrity of the building. The works have been informed by historical evidence.

The proposal is considered acceptable in terms of its impact on the character and appearance of the listed building, its impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area, and the amenity of the adjoining residents and would be recommended for approval.

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