

**Signage and Wayfinding Review:
Removal of fixed wayfinding steles
The Great Court and Room 24 (Living and Dying Gallery)
The British Museum**

Statement of Intent

This statement relates to the proposed removal of 10 signage stele from the Great Court and Living and Dying Gallery (Room 24) of the British Museum in the context of a review and simplification of the visitor wayfinding system. The works will involve the removal of steles that are fixed through the modern floor of the Great Court and Living and Dying Gallery, introduced as part of the Sir Norman Foster design scheme.

Access Statement

These works will not alter existing access arrangements for staff or visitors, and will improve circulation and wayfinding around the building by visitors.

Design Statement

Context

The proposed signage stele removals relate to a revised signage strategy for front-of house permanent and temporary signage in the Great Court and on the route from both public entrances (the Main Entrance on Great Russell Street, and the Montague Place Entrance at the north of the building) to the new Sainsbury Exhibitions Gallery. The new strategy takes into account the significant changes to circulation routes and facilities on the ground floor of the Museum, delivered as part of the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre (WCEC) Project.

Background

The WCEC Project has effected significant changes to circulation routes and facilities on the ground floor of the Museum. These changes comprise:

- Opening of the new WCEC exhibitions gallery
- Opening of the new exhibition foyer (entrance to the exhibitions gallery)
- Opening of a new exhibition shop (exit from the exhibitions gallery, and new route to the Arched Room)
- Opening of the Palestine and Cracherode Rooms (main access route between the Great Court and the new exhibitions gallery, and forming a new circulation route on the ground floor, between the West Stair and Room 24)
- Refurbishment of the Bells Landing and simplification of the North Stairs at Level 02
- Removal of the West Court Café

A revision of the current visitor information provision is required in the context of these changes to ensure the best possible experience for exhibition visitors, and that the new access routes deliver a significant improvement to visitor flow in the ground-floor galleries. In particular, there is an aim to increase the use of the West Stair as a route to Rooms 62-63 'Egyptian death and afterlife: mummies' on the Upper Level.

The physical scope of the changes is limited to the routes to and from the exhibitions gallery and both public entrances (the Main Entrance on Great Russell Street, and the Montague

Place Entrance at the north of the building), vertical and horizontal links on the route, and orientation, wayfinding and promotional signage in the Great Court. The revised visitor information provision will be delivered within the current signage system, using existing vehicles as far as possible. This review represents the first phase of a wider review of the signage system which will be taken forward following the opening of the WCEC as part of the Museum's Building Development Framework.

Design issues

Design

Whybrow Signing Consultants have developed a new design scheme to ensure that visitors are presented with a clear hierarchy of information with wayfinding stele simplified, and any non-essential signage would be removed. This is achieved through:

- The introduction of a beacon colour for directional signage and facilities
- The introduction of exhibition titles and branding on directional signage
- Rationalisation of the information presented on wayfinding stele
- Reversal of pictogram colours so that they are more visible against the stone
- Removal of redundant signage

The previous wayfinding scheme presented too much information on each stele, making them cluttered and difficult to use. The new design scheme strips information back so that only key visitor facilities will be signed on the stele, giving a cleaner look to signage in the Great Court, reducing visual clutter, and encouraging a more intuitive use of signage, with the majority of wayfinding needs provided at a glance. Several crucial decision-making points were identified in the Great Court and the sequence of signage stele has been designed in response to those. This leaves 10 stele without a function across the Great Court and Living and Dying Gallery (Room 24) and it is proposed that these be removed in order to further reduce visual and physical clutter.

Conclusion

The introduction of the new signage scheme and the removal of redundant stele will represent a significant improvement to the visitor experience and ease of wayfinding in the new building. In addition, the removal of stele will open up sightlines and views of the architecture. A series of consultation meetings have been held with Camden Council and English Heritage, including the production of full-scale mock-ups of the new stele, and the outcome was support for the principles of the plan and agreement that the new design is a far more effective wayfinding device.

Heritage Statement

Context

This application relates to the removal of 10 signage steles from the Great Court and Living and Dying Gallery (Room 24) as part of the introduction of a new, simplified wayfinding signage scheme.

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 with the addition of the glass roof and the oval surround to the Round Reading Room.

Significance

The signage steles were installed as part of the Foster scheme and are fixed through the modern floor of the Great Court. The steles are steel structures slotted over a steel beam which is anchored underneath the modern stone floor tiles of the Great Court and Living and Dying Gallery (Room 24). The stele structure will be dismantled to expose the beam. The beam will then be cut beneath the level of the floor with an angle grinder. The intention is to dispose of the steel frames and beams. It is proposed to make good the holes where there are floor penetrations and fixings 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.

Conclusion

The removal of the stele will enhance the sense of space in the Great Court, with fewer interruptions to views of the original façades. This is enabled by the introduction of the wayfinding beacon colour which increases the visibility of the remaining steles. Additionally no physical intervention into the fabric of the building is proposed, other than replacement of sections of the stone tiles where stele fixings have caused penetrations and damage. The proposal is in line with the recommendations of the British Museum Conservation Plan by Purcell.

October 2014