

APPLICATION REF: 2015/0219/INVALID/IN

INTRODUCTION

This outline heritage statement has been prepared to accompany the listed building consent application to retain the temporary platform within the former Reading Room at the British Museum.

This statement should be read in conjunction with the following documentation:

- 'Design and Access Statement for a further temporary listed building consent for the staging in the former Reading Room' dated 15 January 2015 and previously submitted with the application;
- As Built Record Drawings describing the temporary stage installation within the Reading Room space
 - Drawing 230838-007 D Section Through Temporary Exhibition Stage
 - Drawing 230838-011 D Bookshelf Protection
 - Drawing 230838-016 D Exhibition Level Plan
 - Drawing 230838-017 H Existing Floor Level Plan
 - Drawing 230838-031 C Section BB and Elevation 2 Details

HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The British Museum is a Grade I listed building on Great Russell Street in the Bloomsbury area of London. The former Reading Room is located at the centre of the Museum. Robert Smirke's North, South, East and West Wings built between 1823 and 49 originally formed an open courtyard. In 1852 it was agreed that the area be filled in to form the Round Reading Room, proposed by Panizzi the Principal Librarian. Panizzi's plans were refined by Sydney Smirke and work on the single domed circular room surrounding by book stacks was started in 1854 and completed in 1857.

The Reading Room is of high heritage significance. As noted in the British Museum Conservation Plan 2008 the Reading Room is "the most significant development at the British Museum after the completion of Robert Smirke's original scheme".

The Round Reading Room served as the British Library until the late 20th Century when it was moved to a new purpose built building at St Pancras. Norman Foster and Partners won an international design competition in 1994 that proposed the removal of outer bookstacks from the perimeter of the Reading Room, and a new glass and steel roof over the Great Court. This project was carried out between 1998 and 2000.

From 2007 the Round Reading Room has been used as a temporary exhibition gallery, made possible by the insertion of a temporary floor structure above the desks. The design was carried out by Purcell Miller Tritton architects (now Purcell), Metaphor Consultants, Atelier One, and Arup.

IMPACT ON HISTORIC FABRIC

No additional interventions into the Reading Room space are proposed by this application. The temporary platform within the Reading Room is already insitu and no changes are proposed are to it.

The temporary installations were first consented on 27th October 2006 Reference 2006/3731/L which was most recently renewed in February 2011 Reference 2011/0605/P. This application simply seeks to renew this expired consent, for reasons detailed in the accompanying Design and Access Statement.

There will be no effect on the historic fabric, fixtures, furniture and fittings of the former Reading Room, and therefore no impact on the heritage significance of the space. The temporary exhibition stage installation is completely freestanding with no direct attachments to the walls or floors. When the temporary stage was first installed the historic reading desks and the perimeter bookshelves were all retained and protected with temporary enclosures, the details of which are included within the accompanying Design and Access Statement. These protections are all proposed to remain insitu.