



LISTED BUILDING APPLICATION FOR THE BRITISH MUSEUM

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BRITISH MUSEUM LIFE SAFETY PROJECTS 2020-2021 – INSTALLATION OF A FIRE DOOR TO GALLERY 60, LEVEL 6 NORTH RANGE



Figure 1: view from Gallery 60 looking south to goods lift lobby



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Executive Summary

The Life Safety works part of the British Museum's Essential Infrastructure Works

This design, access and conservation statement has been prepared to support an application for Listed Building consent. The application is made on behalf of the Trustees of the British Museum, as directed by the British Museum's Capital Planning and Programme Management team. The application will be submitted by the Planning Lab with HOK International acting as the Museum's agents for architecture and historic building conservation.

The Life Safety programme has been long in the planning. Lawrence Webster Forest Fire Strategy has been in existence for nearly twenty years. This Fire Strategy is an aspirational document that seeks to introduce both active and passive fire detection and mitigation measures. The strategy identifies fire compartment lines and typical designations for fire lines which are of 1, 2 or 4 hours fire protection.

Where new projects are commissioned then it is incumbent on the Museum to try and accommodate the Fire Strategy's advice. In 2014 a dedicated life safety programme commenced. These works affect primarily back of house areas which are deemed as not so architectural significant as front of house areas. Regular reporting of the programme at the quarterly planning and listed building meetings held with the authority, the London Borough of Camden and their statutory advisors Historic England, identify which of the works can be dealt with by an exchange of letters and which require a Listed Building application. The latter are usually reserved for front of house works or as in the case of Gallery 60 where the works affect areas of high significance.

Gallery 60 is currently closed to the public and is a temporary store. The gallery is part of the original Sir Robert Smirke construction and is therefore highly significant to the museum. Major redevelopment of the West and north west wings waits on future programmes of work which at the time of writing are not known.

In 1967 a large goods and exhibition lift was constructed in area to the south of gallery 60. To access this lift there was a need to punch a new opening through the existing southern brick wall. This opening is on a designated compartmentation line fire line between Museum's sectors E North Wing and sector D West Wing. The goods lift passes from the basement through the West Wing's room 77 Greek and Roman Architecture at Level 01 and room 21 the Mausoleum of Halikamassos at Level 02 before rising in the light well in an external brick shaft the was connected to the south wall of the North Wing.



Design & Proposed Scope of Works

The Life Safety programme has been delivering projects since 2014 to address the aspirational recommendations of the LWF Fire Strategy for the British Museum. These projects introduce both passive and active measures to enhance the Museum's ability to prevent, detect and control a fire. These measures when introduced allow time for both people to evacuate, time for the fire service to engage the fire and they help control the spread of fire.

The introduction of passive and active fire measures is particularly challenging within a Grade 1 listed building. If left uncontrolled the urgent operational needs of users and code compliancy can lead to unplanned interventions.

This application seeks to install a new fire door within the opening created in the south wall of Gallery 60. This will allow fire compartmentation between the goods lift structure and the original Smirke north wing, and in line with the Fire Strategy, i.e. creating an aspirational four-hour separation between Sector D and Sector E. A proprietary metal doorset & stainless-steel ironmongery assembly has been chosen which will meet the fire performance criteria set out in the Museum fire plan. The doorset will be sized to suit an existing opening; the works do not require any demolition and are reversible in its nature.

Accessibility Statement

Gallery 60 is currently not open to the public and staff use it as a temporary store. Passage through Gallery 60 into the north wing and its adjacency to the heavy goods lift makes it a goods and material handling route. Access to the goods and material handling lift from the North Wing can only be by staff and security passed contractors

The nature of these works contained in this application do not have a Universal accessibility component. The areas affected by the works are not accessible to the public and maintenance workers can only access through a Museum's permit to work.



History of the North Wing

Gallery 60 is a later addition to the North wing. The conservation plan records that *“Unlike the other upper galleries in the northern range, this room was a later addition above the Arched Room. The layout was in the form of a large exhibition room to the east and two studies to the west”*. Originally built with a shallow roof supported on cast iron beams with a timber secondary structure. This was replaced between 1911-12 when replaced by a fireproof concrete-cased steel roof structure incorporating a full length rooflight above the exhibition room.

In typical Victorian construction evidenced around the Museum the floor is carried by cast iron girders with brick jack-arches supported on the flanges. A timber structure is carried on the iron beams which in turn support joists and an oak boarded floor with a floor trench incorporating cast iron grilles set in Welsh slate around the perimeter.

Significance

Gallery 60, formerly the first Egyptian room, is recorded in the British Museum Conservation Plan prepared by Purcell Architects, final revision, 2008 records *“Built in 1839-41 as part of Sir Robert Smirke’s North West Wing, this room was designed as a westwards continuation of the enfilade of the northern range of rooms completed in 1838. Unlike the other upper galleries in the northern range, this room was a later addition above the Arched Room.”*

The Conservation Plan guidance states the following:

“The remaining original Smirke features are the floor finish in the exhibition room, the east door surround and threshold, the west doors to the ‘Studies’ and the Study windows. The 1912 ceiling is a characteristic feature of the North Wing, and the rooflight with its steel glazing bars still retains the more delicate proportions being lost in the aluminium replacements of the adjoining galleries. The winding mechanism for the original fire shutters is also of modest interest as surviving early technology”.

The Conservation Plan contains the following conservation guidance for ongoing works:

- *In the Gallery the original oak floor should be repaired and left exposed.*
- *The floor grilles should be retained.*
- *The 1912 ceiling is a consistent and unifying feature throughout the Egyptian Galleries and should be retained. If possible the more delicate lines of the existing rooflight should be retained when it is reconstructed.*
- *The window in the north wall may be filled in. The lift lobby to the south is an unwelcome opening in the gallery wall, and a proposal to introduce doors here would be an improvement.*
- *Rooms 60 and 61 are the last in the North Wing to retain the circa. 1900 exhibition cases around the walls, but in view of the need to upgrade them with safety glazing it is unlikely that they can be retained in their present form, and removal would be acceptable.*



- *The doors to the Conservation Laboratory are original, as are the windows to the north and south.*

The introduction of new fire doors is discussed in the conservation plan and is seen as an opportunity. This area is waiting on a major programme of works to bring this space back to gallery use. However, today Gallery 60 is adjacent to a six storey goods lift structure that is not physically separated in case of fire. The needs of the Fire Strategy are compelling and the introduction of proprietary doors needs to be seen in the context of the pressing need to address weaknesses in the existing fire compartmentation lines and the current fallow use of Gallery 60.

Our assessment has made reference to the 'Significance' in terms of heritage-related planning policy as defined in the Glossary of the National Planning Policy Framework as the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest.

Conservation Approach

When commissioning works the Museum seek to develop proposals that protect and enhance the British Museum's significance. With six million visitors a year it is important to balance operational needs, commercial activities alongside collection care, visitor experience and statutory responsibilities.

One of the great challenges for owners and occupiers of historic buildings is the need for change required by the ongoing use of the building. The Conservation Approach for this application is developed from an understanding of the British Museum which arrives from desk top studies of archival material from the British Museum archives and the British Museum Conservation Plan.

The museum Conservation Plan first produced in 1999 and is currently being updated to reflect the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 for addressing the historic environment. Reference was made to the amended Conservation plan for assessing the impact of proposed works on the British Museum.

A heritage impact assessment was used to assess how the proposed intervention will affect Gallery 60. The conservation strategy has been developed in line with the British Museum's Conservation Management Plan (CMP), 2007 and reference made to the National Planning Framework (NPPF, 2019) for addressing the historic environment.

The Museum recognises that the greatest threat to historic buildings comes from fire and therefore the conservation strategy, for interventions such as these, follow a principle of providing enhanced detection and physical barriers to control the spread of fire.

The Life Safety Project Works are utilitarian by their very nature however, this proposed intervention has been developed with respect to the buildings form, fabric and functionality and its Grade 1 listed building designation. Where the Museum is unsure about the sensitivities of the proposed work they are first discussed at the



quarterly meetings where the Local Authorities are consulted. The Life Safety programme works are now in their sixth year. Proposals once discussed at the quarterly meetings are then either covered by a detailed exchange of letters or a formal listed building application is made.

The proposed works in this application affect an area that has already received a major intervention, when in 1967 a large aperture was created to form access into a new six storey goods and material handling lift. This intervention created a situation where important primary spaces are left with minimal protection, should a fire break out in the goods lift. A fire certified door product has been chosen that will allow the Museum to provide four-hour fire protection to this vulnerable area. Once carried out this will greatly enhance protection for this area of the museum. The actual building works required to be carried out are not intrusive and will require fixing the door frames to the existing plastered brick wall opening.

We have evaluated the impact of the interventions outlined in this application by assessing the Heritage Impacts against the assets form, function and fabric. A matrix is adopted that rates the interventions as

- Green *positive, overall neutral/minor impact*
- Yellow *moderate impact*
- Red *major impact*
- White *unknown/TBD*

Summary of Level of Heritage Impact

For a comparative analysis of various options, these are presented as follows:

	Overall Impact	Function	Form	Fabric
Installation of new fire doors	●	●	●	●

Heritage Impact Assessment Conclusion

In conclusion when measured against NPPF clause 195 we believe the proposed interventions described in this application will in our opinion result in “*less than substantial harm*”. The works proposed in this application provide protection to both collection, storage and Departmental work which is imperative for the Museum. Interventions have been considered and selected after the impacts have been fully understood and are needed to mitigate the risk a fire would possess. Overall, on balance we believe the works will have a neutral impact on the overall significance of the museum.



Summary

The 1967 goods and material handling lift was a significant intervention when it was constructed. However, that intervention was required to move material and exhibits from the basement up to the three levels of galleries. Today that intervention poses a risk that a fire in either sectors D or E could spread to the other. The installation of a proprietary fire door with a fire tested and certified level of fire resisting performance will allow the museum to meet with the requirements of the fire plan. The doors are technically reversible and could be removed later if required. The fire doors selected lack the architectural enrichment of original Smirke doors however, the doors are in an area not currently accessed by the public and have been used at back-of-house area on Level 1. Should a programme of work be commissioned to bring back visitor use to Gallery 60 then a more sympathetic door design could be considered.

Appendix – photos

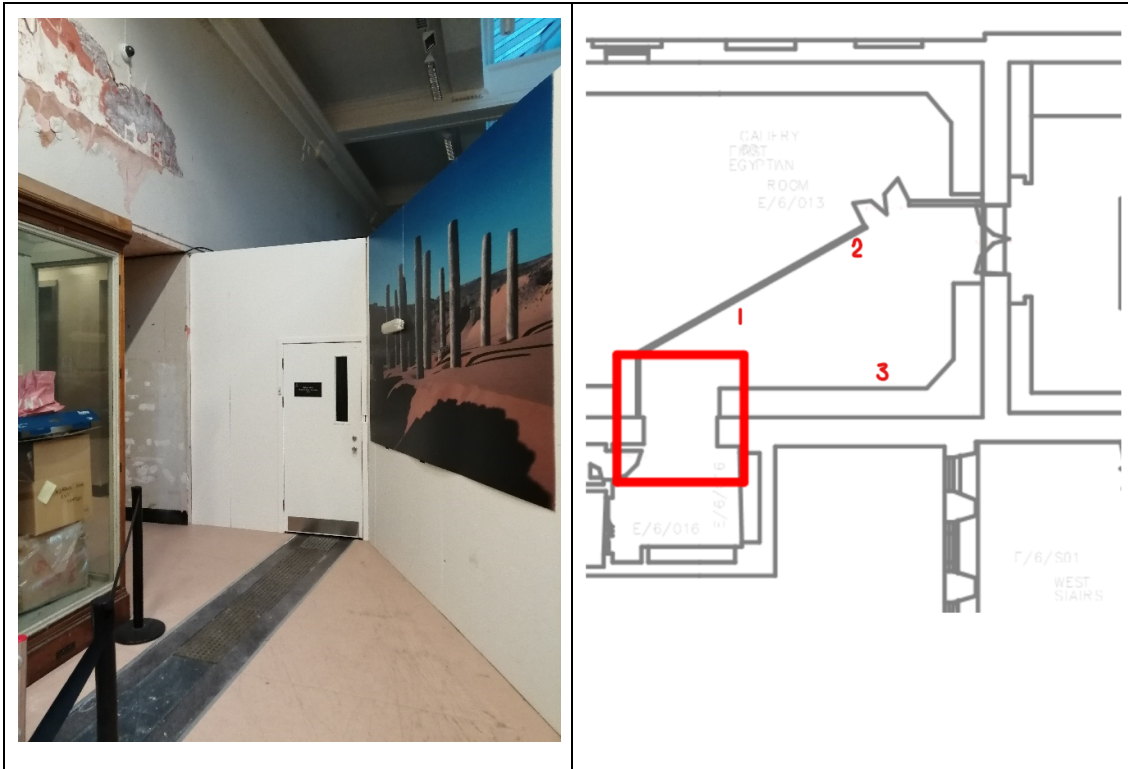


Fig.1 – View towards existing opening of proposed fire door

Gallery 60 part plan



Fig.2 – View towards Gallery 61 door (closed to the public)

Fig.3 – Existing showcases



Fig. 4 – Photomontage of proposed door – Gallery 60 side



Fig. 5 – Photomontage of proposed door – new fire lobby side