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London Borough of Camden
Development Management Team
5 Pancras Square
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FAO Elaine Quigley

Dear Officer

Planning Application | British Museum

Upgrading the New Wing restaurant's oven and ventilation system

Introduction

On behalf of the Trustees of the British Museum, we enclose a planning application for a new extract flue in association with the existing visitor's restaurant in the New Wing, British Museum (BM), Great Russell Street, London, WC1B 3DG.

The existing oven ventilation system servicing the existing Museum restaurant is insufficient to meet the latest fire regulations. It has been recommended that the revised ventilation design include provision for a make up air supply to be installed to accommodate the revised extract design. The new flue is located on the exterior of the New Wing, mostly concealed by the existing accommodation that sits in front.

The proposed description of development is:

"New extract flue on the New Wing".

It has been confirmed with LBC officers via an initial exchange of emails that the proposal does not require listed building consent. This is due to the location of the proposed ventilation extract which affects modern 1970s fabric and will not affect the Museum's character as a building of special historical or architectural interest.

Submission content

This application has been submitted via the planning portal (ref: PP-09585707). The following forms the submission and supporting documents:

- Application form and CIL form
- Location Plan at scale 1:1250 and Block Plan at scale 1:500
- Design Statement by Buro Happold
- Noise Impact Assessment by Buro Happold
- Planning cover letter which includes a summary of the heritage considerations
- Existing and proposed drawings, including plans and elevations
- Specification of the new ventilation system

The relevant application fee of £234 has also been submitted.

The Site

British Museum Estate | The British Museum is one of the UK's most popular visitor attractions. The Museum was founded in 1753, the first national public museum in the world, and has been open to the public since 1759. With approximately eight million objects in the collection, it is arguably the world's greatest display of human history, culture and art. Both permanent collections and special exhibitions are presented within displays for the public. The Museum's Bloomsbury estate is situated on the north side of Great Russell Street within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. It is bounded by Montague Place, Montague Street, Bloomsbury Street and Great Russell Street. The estate houses a number of important listed buildings, including the Grade I listed Quadrangle Building, the King Edward VII Galleries north of the site and the Grade II* railings at the front. The original elements of the Museum date back to 1755- 1822 when Montague House was purchased to house the new British Museum collection. There was a need to expand the Museum as the collection grew bigger. Robert Smirke was the designer of a masterplan which dates from 1823-47. His plans consisted of four wings with an impressive iconic colonnade along the building's south elevation. This building consists of two principle storeys, adhering to the Greek Revival style, which also includes the columns and pediment at the South entrance.

Surrounding uses and designations | These include a range of commercial office, hotel, residential and education uses. The Museum is located in the Midtown BID district (Holborn, Bloomsbury, St Giles), an Archaeological Priority Area, the Background Strategy View (Blackheath), and the Central Activity Zone (CAZ). The Museum is located within an area of excellent transport accessibility with a PTAL rating of 6b. It is close to Russell Square, Holborn, Tottenham Court Road and Goodge Street tube stations, several bus routes operate along Southampton Row and Bloomsbury Street. There are cycle networks in close proximity with secure bike stands. There is a Santander bike hire stand towards the junction between Great Russell Street and Montague Street.

Conservation Plan & heritage significance | The Museum's Conservation Plan was originally adopted in 1999 and later revised by Purcell Architects in 2007/8. The Conservation Plan contains a detailed appraisal of the significance of the Museum as a whole and highlights that it represents the high point of neo-classical Museum style in the UK. As noted above, much of the Museum's estate is Grade I listed, being of international significance and sitting in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The Site was constructed under numerous phases from Smirke's Quadrangle masterplan to the 21st century WCEC. There is innate value in the historical built fabric overall, especially where it survives from the earliest building phases. The use of pioneering construction techniques and innovative design across the phases is also important as are the Museum's association with a succession of architectural figureheads. Its special architectural and historic character can in part be attributed to the significance of its collection and the considerable social value attributed to its use as a Museum; containing of some of the world's most valuable and coveted collection of ancient artefacts. The Museum was founded on the principle that its collection was for the nation and would, therefore be accessible to everyone. This is a key theme which continues today and is a driving force behind much of the Museum's decision making and future planning.

The New Wing, which is the subject of this application was constructed in 1970. It is generally of low significance due to the age of fabric and fairly utilitarian, functional appearance. There has been a restaurant within the New Wing since 1978 which was refurbished and modified by Austin Smith Lord circa 1986-88. It is noted in the CMP that the restaurant is the most impressive of the spaces created by Colin S John Wilson but its original conception has been comprised by the removal of the timber screen.

The Bloomsbury Conservation Area as a whole derives its special interest from its surviving early street pattern, which is laid out in a rectilinear pattern with straight streets leading to open squares, which are often landscaped. The dominant architectural form is the townhouse, with some earlier 17th and 18th century examples surviving alongside later 19th century properties, though a large proportion have been adapted during the 20th century for office or other uses.

The Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal states that "the British Museum is a cultural institution of international importance, occupying a major ensemble of outstanding Grade I listed buildings which make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area as a whole". It recognises that large portions of the Museum cannot be seen from the public realm due to the 'backland nature of much of the site'.

Related planning history | As part of the original Gallery 1 refurbishment works in 2001 (ref: PSX0104763 and LSX0104751), planning and listed building consent was granted for the removal of stairs and local flooring, change of windows on the East Road and the provision of a new safety railing and the installation of air conditioning plant.

Planning Policy Context

The policies within The National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF) (including the NPPG); and the Development Plan form a material consideration in the determination of this application. The Development Plan is formed of GLA's London Plan 2021 and the Camden Local Plan adopted in July 2017. These documents are supported by Camden's Planning Guidance Note on Design; and the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal 2011.

The LBC planning policies most relevant to the consideration of the works presented as part of this application include D1 (Design), and D2 (Heritage). Policy D2, reflects the aims of the NPPF: developments that involve the loss or substantial harm to a designated heritage asset will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss. Developments that propose less than substantial harm are required to be convincingly outweighed by the public benefits of the proposed works. Development should also preserve or enhance the historic environment and heritage assets. LBC will resist development that would cause harm to significance of a listed building through an effect on its setting.

Policy D2 also states that proposals that reduce the energy consumption of listed buildings will be welcomed provided that they do not cause harm to the special architectural and historic interest of the building or group. It recognises that energy use can be reduced by means that do not harm historic fabric or appearance, including through roof installation; secondary glazing; more efficient boilers/plant and heating and lighting systems.

LBC LP policy A1 seek to protect the quality of life of occupiers and neighbours. Permission will be granted for development unless the proposals cause unacceptable harm to amenity, with plant noise limits set in accordance with LBC policy A4.

Proposal and Planning justification

The existing oven and ventilation system within the New Wing restaurant has been in place since 2015. However the ceiling around the existing canopy has discoloured over time which is one indicator that the existing ventilation extraction is inadequate. A new ventilation system with new extract flue is proposed. The new flue will be installed within the existing void of the 1970 ceiling and exit through a small 300mm x 300mm hole on the north elevation of the New Wing. The flue will rise vertically with a termination point at 1m above the parapet. The flue will be painted matt black to blend in with other existing plant and grilles on the north elevation.

The proposed flue is located on the north elevation, hidden between the New Wing and existing accommodation in situ in front of the New Wing. It will not be seen from any views to or from the main courtyard at the front of the Museum. The location of the flue is within the back of house area of the Museum estate with only oblique views at the rear of the properties along Bloomsbury Street. This view is also obscured by a row of tall trees (see ifigure 1). Therefore, the flue is not anticipated to negatively affect the character and appearance of surrounding Bloomsbury Conservation Area and complies with LBC policy D1 and D2.



Figure 1 View of the extract flue

A range of options have been considered, prior to finalising the current proposals. This includes a number of options to adapt a greater area within the existing building. However, these were discounted as it would require more physical intervention and therefore the proposed works is the best option. Further information on discounted options are described in the Design and Access Statement.

The flue will be at least 40m away from nearby residents. Thus, there are no anticipated amenity impacts. A noise assessment has been prepared by Buro Happold and submitted as part of the submission, which concludes that the replacement equipment will be 10dB below background noise level. The new flue will maintain residential amenity and will not affect the work conditions for BM employees within the portacabin structure. The new flue fully complies with LBC policy A1 and A4.

Summary

The proposed works include a small insertion to create 1 hole to allow a new flue to extract air from the oven within the existing restaurant in the new Wing building. The proposed replacement ventilation system is required to meet fire regulations and support the continued use of the restaurant in support of the Museum's visitor services offer. It will also improve the energy efficiency within the New Wing, providing environmental benefits. The proposed works will improve the function of the Museum, which will contribute to the overall visitors' experience and in turn will help BM maintain its international reputation and meet with the objectives of the local and national policies. The new ventilation system and flue will not impact significant fabric or original plan form and therefore the proposals do not cause any harm to the overall significance of the listed building or the surrounding Conservation Area.

In accordance with the agreed terms of the BM Planning Performance Agreement (clause 9.3(h)) we look forward to confirmation of validation of the application within 3 working days of submission, or notification within the same timeframe to confirm if additional information is required.

If you have any questions, please contact me at kelly@theplanninglab.com or Melanie Gurney at melanie@theplanninglab.com, or on 0207 257 9363.

Yours faithfully

Melanie Gurney
The Planning Lab