

23 April 2021

London Borough of Camden  
Development Management Team  
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Dear Officer

## **Applications for planning and listed building consent | British Museum**

### **Proposed ladder and extended gantry at roof level of Gallery 10**

#### **Introduction**

On behalf of the Trustees of the British Museum, we enclose applications for planning and listed building consent to install a ladder and extended gantry at roof level of Gallery 10 (West Wing) at British Museum (BM), Great Russell Street, London, WC1B 3DG.

The BM has had a sharp rise in leaks across the building, directly into galleries, this is putting the collection at risk. With increased frequency of high levels of rainfall it is evident that the existing system is currently overwhelmed. Poor and unsafe access to the roof of Gallery 10 means that this part of the roof is not being effectively maintained at present – from recent photographs there is evidence of organic growth along the gutter wall. The proposals will facilitate access to the west side of the roof to remedy drainage issues in this area, and as a result will ease pressure on the over-loaded historic drainage system. This will provide a vital solution to protecting the fragile objects in the galleries beneath, and in ensuring general upkeep of the building. The proposed works are located at roof level of Gallery 10 and will not be visible from surrounding street level.

The proposed description of development is:

*"Installation of a new access ladder, extension to existing gantry platform, and 2 no. new anchor points at roof level of Gallery 10".*

It has been confirmed with LBC officers via an initial exchange of emails in March 2020 that the proposal requires planning and listed building consent.

#### **Submission content**

This application has been submitted via the planning portal (ref: PP-09752951). The following forms the submission and supporting documents:

- Application form;
- Location Plan at scale 1:1250 and Block Plan at scale 1:500, prepared by Purcell;
- Existing Roof Plan (ref. 24102600-XX-DR-A-1005), prepared by Purcell;
- Existing Roof Section and Elevation (ref. 24102600-XX-DR-A-1006), prepared by Purcell;
- Proposed Roof Plan (ref. 24102600-XX-DR-A-1015), prepared by Purcell;
- Proposed Roof Section and Elevation (ref. 24102600-XX-DR-A-1016), prepared by Purcell;
- Design and Access Statement and Heritage Impact Assessment, dated April 2021, prepared by Purcell.

The relevant planning application fee of £234 has also been submitted. There is no fee for an application for listed building consent.

## The Site

**British Museum Estate** | The British Museum is one of the UK's most popular visitor attractions. BM 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 BM'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 BM date back to 1755- 1822 when Montague House was purchased to house the new British Museum collection. There was a need to expand BM 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 BM 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 BM 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 BM'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 BM 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 BM'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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 BM'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 BM 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 BM's decision making and future planning.

Much of the roof space across the BM has undergone necessary repair over the years, reducing the significance of the built fabric; however, there are instances where the original structure has survived in situ. Having regard to the roof over Gallery 10, constructed in 1856, at the north end of this former courtyard was a top-lit staircase down to the basement and south of it the gallery was fully glazed with hipped rooflights. A concrete arch-ribbed roof was constructed in 1932 with a central longitudinal top duct coffered on the underside and incorporating air supply grilles. On either side the roof would have been glazed. The roof glazing was removed in 1962-69 and a new roof decking was constructed on profiled steel sheet with an external covering of roofing felt. An access walkway was introduced within the roof void above a new suspended ceiling. A plant room was built over the former staircase, which was rebuilt in stock brick in 1998. The roof scape over Gallery 10 has been altered over the years.

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 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century examples surviving alongside later 19<sup>th</sup> century properties, though a large proportion have been adapted during the 20<sup>th</sup> 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 BM cannot be seen from the public realm due to the 'backland nature of much of the site'.

## 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.

London Plan Policy HC1 (heritage conservation and growth) requires development proposals affecting heritage assets, and their settings, to conserve their significance by being sympathetic to the assets' significance and appreciation within their surroundings. The cumulative impacts of incremental change from development on heritage assets and their settings should also be actively managed. Development proposals should avoid harm and identify enhancement opportunities by integrating heritage considerations early on in the design process.

Other relevant guidance is Historic England's Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance (April 2008). Paragraph 117 of the documents confirms that repair necessary to sustain the heritage values of a significant place is normally desirable if:

- a) there is sufficient information comprehensively to understand the impacts of the proposals on the significance of the place; and
- b) the long term consequences of the proposals can, from experience, be demonstrated to be benign, or the proposals are designed not to prejudice alternative solutions in the future; and
- c) the proposals are designed to avoid or minimise harm, if actions necessary to sustain particular heritage values tend to conflict.

## **Proposal and planning justification**

The proposed works provide improved access via a new access ladder to the Gallery 10 roof, with safety cage and hoops fitted to the end wall (this wall encloses a modern plant room). The existing gantry will be extended to accommodate the new ladder, this will be galvanized steel to match existing and will be attached to the existing structural framework. In addition, 2 no. new anchor points will be fitted on the eastern wall of gallery. These will provide latch-on points to clean and maintain the end of the gutter. The anchor points are identical to those already fixed into Gallery 4 external walls. Whilst there will be small holes made into the building fabric for the fixings, these measures will ensure that the roof can be safely accessed and properly maintained into the future.

Overall, the proposals are considered to be essential to maintain the building into the future. The proposals will ensure that the roof of Gallery 10 can be safely accessed by trained operatives to maintain the condition of the gutters and roof and to remedy drainage issues. This ensures that the minimum requirements of the building regulations are met and will help to achieve safe working practices in accordance with health and safety guidelines.

Having regard to heritage impacts, any new material will match the existing and all fixing methods are reversible. The proposals are therefore entirely appropriate and sensitive in their nature. As described in the accompanying Heritage Impact Assessment, the introduction of a new ladder system to the roof of Gallery 10 is a minor change to the roof. The works are not visible from public spaces. The roof to Gallery 10 is lower than the surrounding areas of the building so it will be seen from the courtyard or impact views of BM and the Conservation Area. Further, the roof over Gallery 10 does not contain any highly significant rooflights or structures. Whilst the fixings will result in some very minimal interventions being made into the fabric of the building, this fabric encloses a modern plant room and therefore is not considered to be of particular historic or architectural interest. It is considered that the benefits of the proposal will safeguard the BM and enable access and maintenance of the roof. The benefits of the proposal therefore considerably outweigh the low adverse impact on the heritage asset, in accordance with national and local planning policy, specifically Camden's Local Plan Policy D2 and advice set out within Historic England's Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance (2008).

## **Summary**

The proposed works include the installation of a new access ladder, extension to existing gantry platform, and 2 no. new anchor points at roof level of Gallery 10. The proposed works will improve the upkeep and maintenance of the BM, 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 proposals 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 [kelly@theplanninglab.com](mailto:kelly@theplanninglab.com) or [melanie@theplanninglab.com](mailto:melanie@theplanninglab.com), or on 0207 257 9363.

Yours faithfully

**The Planning Lab**