

# **BUILDING ONE**

# **PLANNING STATEMENT**

## **THE SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP AT WROUGHTON**

### **ON BEHALF OF THE SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP**

**TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED)  
PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE ACT 2004**

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**PLANNING** | **DESIGN** | **ENVIRONMENT** | **ECONOMICS**

## CONTENTS:

Page No:

|    |   |    |
|----|---|----|
| 1. | INTRODUCTION  | 1  |
| 2. | THE SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA                       | 6  |
| 3. | DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL                                | 14 |
| 4. | PLANNING AND POLICY CONTEXT                         | 19 |
| 5. | MAIN PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS                        | 35 |
| 6. | EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES (NPPF PARAGRAPH 116 TEST) | 46 |
| 7. | CONCLUSION  | 53 |

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Planning Statement accompanies a planning application submitted by Pegasus Group on behalf of the Science Museum Group ["SMG"]. The application proposal is for the construction of a collections management facility on land at the Science Museum Group at Wroughton ["SMGW"]. This project – called "Building ONE" – is the SMG's single largest project for twenty years.

### Background to Development

1.2 SMG comprises: -

- The Science Museum, London
- The Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester
- The National Railway Museum, York and Shildon
- The National Science and Media Museum, Bradford
- The Science Museum Group Wroughton, Swindon

1.3 SMG holds the nation's preeminent collection of science, technology, engineering, medicine, transport and media. The collection is astonishingly diverse – encompassing everything from aeroplanes to anatomical votives. Together these objects tell the story of our world – from the Indus Valley civilisation over 3000 years ago to the cutting-edge microchips that power our connected planet today. The SMG's mission to inspire futures includes bringing the management of its world-class collection into the 21st century. They seek to continually evolve and improve how people engage with the astonishing stories of creativity, progress and humanity embedded in the collection and transforming how it is cared for, accessed and shared with global audiences. This revolutionary, once-in-a-generation project is called *ONE Collection*.

1.4 The Wroughton site is already acknowledged as a primary collections storage facility for SMG, currently housing approximately 35,000 large objects. The site is owned by the Board of Trustees of the Science Museum. A second site, at Blythe House in West Kensington, London currently provides alternative storage for 320,000 objects of historic international significance. Blythe House forms part

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the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) estate and is leased to SMG, and is shared with the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum.

- 1.5 SMG must vacate Blythe House by the end of March 2023 due to the sale of that premises by DCMS. The Government's decision to sell Blythe House now presents a unique opportunity for SMG to make significant progress towards relocating the collections stored in inadequate conditions at Blythe House, and in the majority of the life-expired hangars at Wroughton, into a purpose-built collections management facility. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for SMG to invest at Wroughton, and further demonstrates the commitment to using the Wroughton site as a sector leading national collections centre. There is no doubt that the development proposal will raise the profile of the site, Wroughton and Swindon, as a location of international significance in the heritage sector.
- 1.6 Building ONE will set a benchmark for museums in sustainable collection care and lead the way in foregrounding the national and international significance of Britain's scientific and cultural heritage. It will also accommodate managed public visits.
- 1.7 The ONE Collection project is ambitious in scope, with wide-ranging impacts. The core activities are: -
- Constructing a purpose-built collections management facility at Wroughton. This 26,000 sq m footprint building will house over 80% (approximately 340,000) of the SMG's Collection in stable, accessible conditions. The building will be low-energy and operationally efficient and set new standards for sustainable collection care.
  - Cataloguing, digitising and re-locating 320,000 objects from Blythe House to Wroughton. SMG's rapid digitisation programme will be unprecedented for the science heritage sector and will create the one of the first and most extensive scientific collections to be universally accessible online. These records are the bedrock of SMG's vision for new forms of digital access and engagement.
  - Engaging audiences with the stories embedded in SMG's collection through a wide-ranging programme of participation projects, public events, art

commissions and online content. This programme will be designed to ensure more of the SMG collection becomes better understood, used and admired, by everyone from students to scientists, engineers, historians, enthusiasts, designers, architects and artists.

1.8 SMG vision to develop this site and expand its ambitions in the creation of a national collections centre for the storage and management of heritage collections has already been supported by the Secretary of State for Department for Communities and Local Government in his Decision Letter [and Inspector's Report] relating to the permitted Swindon Solar Farm. It was also acknowledged during the solar park Inquiry that the northern and eastern clusters of buildings represent the most important areas of the site for the development of new storage facilities. This application proposal accords with this vision.

1.9 The new building will allow the SMG to relocate the objects contained within the site's life-expired hangars and from the inadequate stores at Blythe House. By relocating the collection from the existing hangars to the new building SMG will for the first time be able to provide optimal storage conditions for the vast majority of the collection within its care, and support the care of other institutions collections throughout the sector. Furthermore, the vacated dilapidated hangars can then be refurbished to create additional facilities. This cannot be achieved with the collections in situ, and without this new facility, the hangars and the collections held within them are at significant risk.

1.10 This Statement has been prepared to aid the Council's consideration of the application proposal. The subsequent sections of this Statement are divided into:

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**Section 2: *Site and Surrounds***

1.11 This section contains a description of the application site and its environs.

**Section 3: *The Proposal***

1.12 This section contains a description of the proposal and the development parameters that would form part of any formal planning application.

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**Section 4:** *Planning Policy Context and Material Considerations*

- 1.13 The planning policy context for the site includes both national policy guidance and the statutory development plan which comprise the Swindon Local Plan 2026. Brief explanations of the key policies pertaining to the development proposal is contained within this section.

**Section 5:** *Main Planning Considerations*

- 1.14 This section of the Statement presents a detailed analysis of the principle of development measured against the relevant material planning considerations. Considerations are addressed in turn and are explained in the context of the relevant planning policy outlined in section 4. Technical matters are considered in detail through other supporting statements and as such not considered in detail in this report.

**Section 6:** *Exceptional Circumstances and Planning Balance*

- 1.15 Section 7 specifically reflects paragraph 116 of the National Planning Policy Framework and provides a detailed explanation why there are both; exceptional circumstances and public interest for Swindon Borough Council, as local planning authority, to grant planning permission.

**Section 7:** *Conclusions*

- 1.16 This provides the concluding comments in relation to the application proposal.

**Planning Application Documentation**

- 1.17 In addition to this Planning Statement, the application proposal is supported by the following documentation: -

- Planning application drawings and Topo Survey
- Design and Access Statement
- Sustainability Statement
- Planning Statement
- Statement of Community Engagement

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- Environmental Statement
  - Environmental Statement Non-Technical Summary
  - Ecological Impact Assessment
  - Transport Statement
  - Flood Risk Assessment
  - Desk Top Land Contamination Assessment
  - Earthworks Strategy
  - Drainage Strategy
  - External Lighting Assessment

1.18 This Planning statement should be read in conjunction with the wider suite of documentation that collectively comprise the planning and Environmental Impact Assessment submission. The application documentation demonstrates the diligent approach taken by the applicant and their experienced consultant team, in delivering a well-considered proposal based on sound environmental, ecological and sustainable development considerations.

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## 2. THE SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

### *The Wider Site – The Science Museum Group at Wroughton*

- 2.1 The SMGW occupies a former RAF airfield base (operational from the 1930's to the 1970's) and is located approximately 6.5km south of the centre of Swindon and 1.4km south of the intervening village of Wroughton. The SMGW has occupied the site since 1980.
- 2.2 The site extends to 220 hectares (545 acres) and contains the remnants of the former RAF Wroughton military air base including the runways, hangars and associated buildings, as well as woodland and private open space used for sheep grazing. The site also houses the Swindon Solar Farm on the southern half of the site and the 'Hive' research facility for the University of Bath.
- 2.3 The landscape context surrounding the site, is open and rural, with both arable and pasture farmland that extends to the higher land to the south, known as Barbury Hill and its associated chalk scarp. To the north of the wider SMGW site lies a further scarp slope that is heavily wooded, separating the site from the village of Wroughton. Further to the north lies the M4 motorway corridor and the market town of Swindon, located at the head of a wide valley known as the Vale of White Horse. The remainder of the land to the north of the Site is interspersed with small local roads that link numerous small villages and farmsteads.
- 2.4 To the east and west of the site is a continuation of arable and pastoral farmland located between two scarp slopes that are approximately 3km apart, along with the villages of Broad Hinton, Chiseldon, the hamlet of Uffcott and residential areas of Thorney Park, Langton Park and Beranburh Field.
- 2.5 To the south, the landform steepens as it climbs the escarpment that is for the most part open, with limited vegetation. Further to the south and beyond the escarpment the open agricultural landscape continues as part of the Marlborough Downs, interspersed with occasional equestrian centres (paddocks and grass race tracks), with a few local roads connecting the settlements of Avebury and Marlborough at an approximate distance of 7.0km.

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*Planning Unit*

- 2.6 The site is a single planning unit that is in use for museum related activities. All other activities on the planning unit, such as the lease of hangars for storage purposes, the solar park, the research facilities, the use of runways for research and storage activities and use of managed grasslands for grazing are ancillary to the main use.

*The Development Site & Previously Developed Land*

- 2.7 The development footprint of Building ONE is located in the northern half of SMG's site and occupies a parcel of managed grassland located between the taxiways and runways. The 2014 Public Inquiry for the solar park confirm the PDL status of the entire planning unit whereby the Inspector and the Secretary of State both agreed that the entire curtilage of the previously developed land extends out to the perimeter fencing of the unit and includes the grasslands in between the former runways and taxiways. The Secretary of State decision also specified that the improved grasslands within the site cannot be regarded, in its own rights, to have a high environmental value.

*Access*

- 2.8 Vehicular access to the site is currently provided via an existing priority T-junction at Red Barn Gate from the A4361 Devizes Road. It is understood that the existing access has an achievable visibility splay of 215 metres to the nearside kerb looking to right at the junction at a setback of 2.4 metres and a visibility splay of 172.7 metres looking to the left. The unnamed access road continues southbound for approximately 170 metres to a gated access leading to the SMGW site. The unnamed access road forms a cul-de-sac approximately 370 metres to the south. The carriageway measures approximately five metres and the road is subject to the national speed limit.
- 2.9 The A4361 Devizes Road runs parallel to the western boundary of site. Within the vicinity of the site, the A4361 is a single carriageway road and travels in an approximate north-south direction and connects Swindon town centre with Devizes, via the A361 to the south of the site. The A4361 Devizes Road also serves as a bus route from Swindon to Devizes, via Wroughton.

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## Designations

- 2.10 The development site is located within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which covers an area of approximately 668 sq miles between Reading and Swindon to the east and north, and Andover and Devizes to the south and east.
- 2.11 The Avebury World Heritage Site (WHS) is located at an approximate distance of 7.5km from the development site.
- 2.12 There are thirteen scheduled monuments within 5km of the proposed development Site including a grouping centred on Barbury Castle and includes adjacent field systems and earth works approximately 1.25km at their closest point to the south.

## Planning History

- 2.13 The SMGW has an extensive planning history. The industrial context of the site originates from the 1940s. Work on Wroughton Airfield began in 1939 and was completed in 1940, for aircraft storage, with its use escalating throughout World War II. In 1943 two further runways were added. In the post-war years the site was used for adapting aeroplanes, as a repository for aircraft waiting to be scrapped, and for servicing helicopters. The latter function gave way to the Royal Navy taking over the site in 1972.
- 2.14 The planning history for the site is complex and the key recent applications and permissions are identified below.
- 2.15 **Planning Permission S/17/0153:** Refurbishment of Hangar C3. This included the complete refurbishment of the hangar by way of removing and replacing the existing asbestos cement cladding. The application was submitted on 26 January 2017 and duly granted on 7 June 2017.
- 2.16 **Planning Permission S/16/1994:** Erection of a 2.4-metre-high perimeter fence and erection of 10 no. CCTV cameras at the Wessex RXCA Hangar. The application was submitted to the Council on 17 November 2016 and duly granted on 16 March 2017.

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- 2.17 **Planning Permission S/13/0809:** Large scale ground mounted solar park granted on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2015 by Secretary of State Direction (Ref: APP/U3935/V/14/2216792).
- 2.18 **Planning Permission S/14/1755:** This consent effectively relates to the variation of condition 1 imposed on S/14/1755 which extended the temporary planning permission from November 2014 to November 2015.
- 2.19 **Planning Permission S/14/1710:** The proposal is to construct an enclosure for an environmental chamber on the site of the existing Building Research Park and the HIVE. The application was submitted on 2 October 2014 and approved on 28 November 2014.
- 2.20 **Planning Permission S/14/0344:** This implemented planning permission relates to the change of use from disused runway/ events space to a short-term research and development facility for the testing automated barrier systems for Dartford Tunnel barrier upgrades. The change of use supports the ambition shared by both the Science Museum and members of the Swindon business community and Borough Council officers to see the site used to enhance the Research and Development.
- 2.21 The application was submitted on 1 March 2014 and granted on 9 May 2014. A temporary planning permission was secured until 30<sup>th</sup> November 2014.
- 2.22 **Planning Permission S/13/0079:** This implemented planning permission relates to the construction of a two-storey experimental building, a single storey materials store and up to sixteen single storey experimental 'pods'. Buildings are for the purpose of evaluating the environmental performance and durability of novel, low carbon, low environmental impact construction materials and systems, and to develop effective monitoring and management technologies. The application was submitted on 17 January 2013 and approved on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2013.
- 2.23 **Non-Material amendment** was approved on 26 February 2014 which related to the reorientation of the main building and the 16 pads.
- 2.24 **Planning Application S/12/0717:** Change of use of land and buildings from indoor leisure karting (Class D2) to a mixed use comprising indoor leisure karting

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(Class D2) and car auction site (Sui Generis) and associated works at C2 Hangar. The application was registered on 17 May 2012 and refused on 12 October 2012.

- 2.25 **Planning Permission S/12/0327:** Installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels on land north of Hangar D2 at the Science Museum. The application was received on 3 March 2012 and permission was duly granted on 16 April 2012. The permission relates to the installation of 50kw solar arrays on land associated with the Science Museum.
- 2.26 **Planning Permission S/10/0727:** Erection of 2 wind turbines, 1 Erection of 2 no. small wind turbines, 1 no. tracking solar array, 1 no. fixed solar array, 1 no. solar array mounted on one of 3 no. control cabins and ancillary development. The application was submitted on 13 May 2010 and planning permission was duly granted on 7 July 2010.
- 2.27 **Planning Permission: S/10/0656:** Refurbishment of Hangar C1. This included the complete refurbishment of the hangar by way of removing and replacing the existing asbestos cement cladding. The application was submitted on 30 April 2010 and duly granted on 8 July 2010.
- 2.28 **Planning Permission S/08/1903:** Temporary use of runways for vehicle storage and erection of a temporary unit (maximum 12 months). The application was received on 27 September 2008 and temporary planning permission granted on 8 January 2009. Planning permission has not been implemented.
- 2.29 **Planning Permission S/07/2942:** Change of use from museum (Class D1) to data storage facility (sui generis) at Hangar L3. The application was submitted to the local planning authority on 10 December 2007 and planning permission for the change of use was duly granted on 4 March 2008. Planning permission has not been implemented.
- 2.30 **Planning Permission S/06/2678:** This implemented planning permission relates to the change of use of existing building to library and associated works. The application was received on 30 October and permission granted on 21 December 2006.
- 2.31 **Planning Application S/05/3110:** Outline application for the storage, conservation and display of the National Museums' collections in an educational

and inspirational manner; incorporating the phased delivery of a purpose-built national collections centre with ancillary catering, retailing and accommodation facilities; sustainable business enterprise and sustainable research and development; all to be integrated within a restored and managed landscape, use classes D1, B1, C1, Sui Generis and ancillary A1 and A3 - Means of Access not reserved. The application was received on 25 October 2005. The application was considered by the Planning Committee on 23 May 2006 whereby it was resolved that the Director of Planning be authorised to grant planning permission following the referral of the application to the Department of Community and Local Government and, amongst other issues, subject to the completion of a Section 106 Agreement. The application was subsequently withdrawn.

- 2.32 **Planning Permission S/05/2827:** This implemented planning permission related to the temporary change of use from 30 November 2005 to 23 December 2005 (24 days) from Museum Storage (B8) to Christmas Party Event (Sui Generis). The application was submitted on 20 September 2005 and approved on 25 November 2005.
- 2.33 **Planning Permission S/05/0457:** This implemented planning permission relates to the change of use from engineering workshops to conservation workshop and exhibition spaces with associated visitor facilities. The application was submitted on 9 February 2005 and permitted on 20 June 2005.
- 2.34 **Planning Permission S/04/2664:** Change of use of Hangar C2 to indoor leisure karting. The application was submitted on 12 July 2004 and subsequently permitted on 24 November 2004.
- 2.35 **Planning Application S/01/3694:** Use of all existing buildings and central areas of the runway for corporate and commercial driving events for a maximum of 45 days in each calendar year. The application was submitted on 29 November 2001 and subsequently withdrawn.
- 2.36 **Planning Application S/01/3839:** Use of buildings and central area of runways for commercial events for a maximum of 20 days in each calendar year. The application was submitted on 29 November and subsequently withdrawn.

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- 2.37 **Planning Permission S/00/0036:** Related to the continued use without complying with condition 10 of permission T97.949/RJ at C2 hangar. The application was submitted on 11 January 2000 and permitted on 7 August 2000.
- 2.38 **Planning Permission T/97/0949:** Change of use from storage to leisure karting centre at C2 hangar. The application was submitted on 23 July 1997 and permitted on 8 December 1997.
- 2.39 **Planning Permission S/02/3921:** Renewal of previous temporary planning permission T97/0949RJ for leisure karting and associated use at C2 hangar. The application was submitted on 11 December 2002 and permitted on 11 June 2003.
- 2.40 **Planning Permission S/00/1472 (Outline):** Demolition of the former RAF Princess Alexandra Hospital site (development area was circa 26.3 hectares) and redevelopment consisting of conference facilities, residential, office and community uses together with associated open space. The application was submitted on 18 July 2000 and outline permission granted on 22 April 2002. Separate reserved matters applications were then approved for office development, residential units, and conference centre.
- 2.41 **Planning Permission S/03/1966:** Erection of conference centre (reserved matters) at the former RAF Princes Alexandra Hospital site. This reserved matters application was submitted on 10 June 2003 (pursuant permitted outline masterplan S/00/01472). The reserved matters were approved on 19 November 2003.
- 2.42 **Planning Permission S/03/0880:** Erection of office development (reserved matters pursuant to permitted outline masterplan S/00/01472). This reserved matters application was submitted on 17 March 2003 and approved on 9 December 2003.

*Planning History Summary*

- 2.43 The planning history set out above gives recognition that the principle of improving and providing additional collections management and educational facility at the SMGW has previously accepted by the Swindon Borough Council<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> As per resolution to grant of Planning Application S/05/3110

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2.44 The planning history demonstrates that the site is a unique site within the AONB whereby the policy and development control position is one of fostering appropriate development that is linked to the Science Museum Group as opposed to restricting development.

### 3. DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

3.1 The development proposal relates to the erection of a collections management facility with an overall building size of approximately 289m by 92m. The proposal will provide a gross internal area of up to 27,000 sq m with up to 9,274 sq m of additional mezzanine together with associated car parking, servicing and access arrangements. The maximum height of the collections management facility would be 12m.

3.2 The collections management facility will be subdivided into the following areas (note these dimensions are approximate): -

| <i>Use</i>         | <i>Space</i>              | <i>Footprint</i>                    |
|--------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Stores             | Object Store              | 23,790 sq m                         |
|                    | Collections Study         | 230 sq m                            |
|                    | Conservation Workshop     | 500 sq m                            |
|                    | Photography Studio        | 170 sq m                            |
|                    | Conservation Freezer      | 117 sq m                            |
|                    | Conservation Laboratory   | 207 sq m                            |
|                    | Conditioned Store         | On mezzanine                        |
|                    | Special Collections Store | 170 sq m                            |
| Services & Welfare | Staff Welfare             | 73 sq m                             |
|                    | Entrance Lobby            | 56 sq m                             |
|                    | Toilets                   | 30 sq m                             |
| Logistics          | Inward Transit            | 200 sq m                            |
|                    | Loading Bay               | 290 sq m                            |
|                    | Transit Storage           | 260 sq m                            |
|                    | Outward Transit           | 120 sq m                            |
| <b>Total</b>       |                           | <b>Mezzanine<br/>9,274 sq m</b>     |
|                    |                           | <b>Building GIA<br/>26,394 sq m</b> |

3.3 Additional external plant infrastructure include boiler house, chiller compound, chilled water pump, substation, air handling units, sprinkler pump house and waste store.

3.4 Full details of the development proposal are provided on the planning application drawings.

#### **Access and Trip Generation**

3.5 The development proposal will utilise the existing access arrangements, namely the priority T-junction at Red Barn Gate from the A4361 Devizes Road to the west of the site and then via the site's internal access roads. The internal access routes will follow the existing established routes to the development site.

3.6 The applicant anticipates a maximum of 15,000 visitors per year to the Building ONE facility. These would approximately be made up of: -

- Public tours operating on 2 days (2 tours concurrently, 3 times a day) of the week for 30 weeks of the year. On a pre-booked basis (c. 11,000 visitors);
- School visits facilitated on 2 days of the week for 30 weeks of the year on a pre-booked basis (c.3,000 visitors); and
- Up to 6 collections researchers 5 days a week for 30 weeks of the year on a pre-booked basis (c.1,000 visitors).

3.7 Visitors would arrive by a combination of personal vehicles, coaches and public transport. There would be approximately 35 additional vehicles arriving at site each day, primarily in off-peak times.

3.8 Vehicles would be accommodated in existing on-site parking areas with the wider site, the proposal would also provide an additional 12 no parking spaces including 2 DDA spaces.

3.9 Non-SMG staff accessing Building ONE by appointment would park at the existing visitor area on site before being escorted to the proposed building.

3.10 Traffic associated with the delivery and collection of objects stored at the Building ONE facility will reflect current site operations. The additional collections

transport impacts would be minimal, and this is reflected in the proposed layout design which only provides a single loading bay. The additional collections management traffic is expected to be circa three to four HGV movements and three to four LGV movements per week. The majority of these deliveries will take place outside peak hours.

### **Staffing Arrangement**

- 3.11 On completion of the new collections facility, SMG staff numbers are likely to increase from its existing levels of around 20 staff per day to around 50 staff per day working across the site and within the new facility. This may vary at time to time dependant on projects and programme.

### **Vision**

- 3.12 Building ONE will help realise the ONE Collection vision for the SMG collection and enable new generations to discover its relevance to them. These are some of the new ways people will engage: -

*An online 'discovery tool' for the endlessly curious*

- 3.13 The development proposal represents a true step-change in digital access to the collection. The proportion of objects available to view online will jump from 5% to 75%. Hundreds of thousands of new records will become immediately available through a fast, effective search function. The SMG ambition is to ensure the diversity and richness of the collection is discoverable by everyone – not just those with a particular question in mind. They will invest in an intuitive online tool which visualises the extraordinary wealth of objects of different sizes, forms, materials and ages, and invites users on serendipitous journeys through the collection.

*Inspiring international audiences*

- 3.14 Building ONE will allow SMG to unleash the collection's most compelling stories. Online, the SMG can weave together extraordinary objects, historical events and powerful people stories into rich multimedia narratives. These will become the go-to destination for exploring the impacts of science on our lives. Evidence shows that the demand for stories about our collection is particularly strong among international audiences – revealing the potential of Building ONE to reach new

and more diverse people. A 2016 research study undertaken by Frankly, Green + Webb showed that 67% of visits to the content-rich narratives on the Science Museum website were international (the percentage of international visits to the museum landing page was just 43%). The figures for the National Science and Media Museum reflected this trend too, with 42% of visits to the online collection being from international users.

#### *Educational Resources*

- 3.15 This project will transform the SMG Collection into a unique, flexible and accessible learning resource. The digitised collection will complement galleries and programmes across the SMG's museums and, crucially, reach those who are unable to visit. It will be available free of charge to teachers and their students to explore and discover, guided by learning resources that link aspects of the curriculum to particular objects. The applicant will invest in research into how new digital technologies – including 3D scanning – can enhance the classroom experience, for example seeing objects in incredible detail or printing replicas to handle.

#### *From 'behind-the-scenes' to everyone's screen*

- 3.16 There is something special about seeing behind-the-scenes. Evaluation of public tours of Blythe House, and wider sector audience research, fully endorse the unique insights and connections that arise from viewing collections in store. While public access to both Blythe House and Wroughton are currently severely limited, the Building ONE collections management facility will enable regular public tours, including educational trips by schools within the Swindon and Wiltshire administrative areas. The SMG will maximise the public benefit by making the facility, as well as the collection, accessible remotely to a virtual global audience – for example extending our partnership with Google Street View to enable people to walk amongst the collection and delivering live-streamed curator-led tours.

#### *Effective Collections Management.*

- 3.17 The collection stored at Building ONE forms the backbone of the exhibitions and galleries displayed at the Group's sites around the country. The improved access to these objects as a result of the new facilities, the digitisation and the organised way they will be stored, drives real efficiencies in both cost and time, creating a

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truly game-changing way in which the SMG can turn around objects for display. This shift-change in the way the collections are housed in the building, will enable a much more extensive and rapid loans program – benefiting other museums and galleries both nationally and internationally.

#### 4. PLANNING AND POLICY CONTEXT

4.1 This section of the Planning Statement identifies the national and local planning policy and guidance pertinent to the application site and development proposal. The plan-led approach to development as enshrined by Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, requires development proposals to accord with the adopted development plan unless material consideration indicate otherwise. Government's Planning Practice Guidance on Determining Planning applications (last updated 1 September 2015) sets out what may be a material consideration. Paragraph 8 of the guidance states ***"A material planning consideration is one which is relevant to making the planning decision in question (e.g. whether to grant or refuse an application for planning permission). The scope of what can constitute a material consideration is very wide and so the courts often do not indicate what cannot be a material consideration. However, in general they have taken the view that planning is concerned with land use in the public interest, so that the protection of purely private interests such as the impact of a development on the value of a neighbouring property or loss of private rights to light could not be material considerations"***.

4.2 The components of the Development Plan pertinent to the application site and development proposal comprises: -

- The Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026 (adopted March 2015).

4.3 The material planning considerations include: -

- National Planning Policy Framework (published March 2012);
- National Heritage Act 1983 (as amended);
- The Mendoza Review: An Independent Review of Museums in England (November 2017);
- The Culture White Paper March 2016;
- Written Ministerial Statement Planning for Growth; and
- Wroughton Neighbourhood Plan 2016 – 2026 (April 2016).

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## DEVELOPMENT PLAN

### **The Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026 (adopted March 2015)**

- 4.4 The Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026 was adopted in March 2015 and sets out the local policy framework to deliver sustainable growth to 2026 and beyond. In accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, applications for planning permission should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.5 The Local Plan includes Policies Map which shows the administrative area to which the policies contained in the plan relate. The relevant extract of the Policies Map pertinent to the development site is set out below and shows how the site is located outside Wroughton's settlement boundary and within the SMG's land use allocation.



- Policy SD3 Managing Development
- Policy CM3 Integrating Facilities and Delivering Services
- **Policy CM4 Maintaining and Enhancing Community Facilities**
- Policy TR2 Transport and Development
- **Policy EN5 Landscape Character and Historic Landscape**

4.7 Each policy is discussed in turn below.

4.8 As the site is located within the SMGW's landholding, it is prudent to consider its namesake policy. **Policy RA2** states (inter alia): -

Development at Wroughton shall be in accordance with Policies SD1 and SD2 and should support the following local priorities at Wroughton: -

- Maximise opportunities associated with the Science Museum to benefit Wroughton and the Borough through: (i) Realising tourism benefits associated with the Science Museum; and (ii) Allowing expansion of museum related activities and enabling development providing the benefits of the development are delivered sustainably and do not conflict with other policies in the Local Plan.

4.9 The thrust of the Policy, with regards to development opportunities at the Science Museum, is to deliver proposal which benefit Wroughton and the Borough. The development proposal contributes towards both of these requirements. The policy goes on to identify how enabling development would be promoted providing the benefits of the development are delivered sustainably and do not conflict with the other policies of the Plan.

4.10 In this instance, the development proposal includes the creation of a new purpose-built facility to enable the SMG to facilitate the preservation, conservation and engagement of its stored collections in line with its duty of care under the National Heritage Act 1983.

4.11 The Policy makes reference to **Policies SD1 and SD2** and these are discussed in turn below.

- 4.12 **Policy SD1** relates to the delivery of sustainable development and sustainable communities. The policy sets out sustainable development principles which should be followed by proposals and states: -

To enable the delivery of sustainable development and support sustainable communities in the Borough all development proposals will: (i) be of high quality design; (ii) promote healthy, safe and inclusive communities; (iii) respect, conserve, and / or enhance the natural, built and historic environments; (iv) assess and address the impact of climate change through mitigation and / or adaptation measures; (v) provide or contribute to the assessed local and borough wide infrastructure and service requirements; (vi) contribute to the retention of jobs and growth of the local economy and complement Town Centre regeneration; (vii) be accessible by walking, cycling and/or public transport; and, (viii) use land and resources (such as water, energy, minerals and waste) in an efficient and effective way.

- 4.13 The amplification to the policy, at paragraph 3.7 of the Local Plan, states ***“Policy SD1 sets out the development principles which underpin this Local Plan and the development proposals which will come forward in the Borough. They represent a sustainable and balanced approach to the provision of new development and respond to [amongst other things] the need for new development to contribute to sustainable and balanced growth and change for the better in the borough”***. The development proposal would meet these requirements.
- 4.14 **Policy SD2** sets out the sustainable development strategy of the Development Plan. It states that development proposal in locations outside the settlement boundaries will be permitted where, amongst other things, it is in accordance with other policies of the Plan permitting specific development in the countryside. This in turn leads us to Policies CM4 and CM3.
- 4.15 **Policy CM4** is also pertinent as the collections management facility will provide an exemplar visitor experience. It is envisaged that Building ONE would generate a maximum of 15,000 visitors per year. These would approximately be made up of public tours, school visits on a pre-booked basis. The Policy states (inter alia):

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a. Proposals for new or extended community facilities will be supported, particularly where: the site is located within or adjacent to existing settlements; it is accessible for all members of the community and promotes social inclusion, and if possible they can be co-located with other community uses.

- 4.16 The reasoned justification to the Policy, at paragraph 4.303, states ***“Proposals for new facilities or the extension of existing community facilities will be supported where they promote the principle of creating and/or maintaining sustainable communities, for example through the co-location of services on a single site. The development of new sites should be located within or adjacent to existing settlements, and be well located to the intended catchment population to maximise the opportunity to travel to these facilities by sustainable transport means, particularly walking and cycling”***
- 4.17 Paragraph 4.308 goes on to list examples of community facilities and these include: ***“museums and art galleries”***. As stated elsewhere in this statement, the SMG site at Wroughton is located adjacent to existing settlement and therefore receives the full support of Policy CM4.
- 4.18 Through **Policy CM3** the Council will seek to encourage the delivery of flexible multi-use buildings.
- 4.19 **Policy SD3** sets out how the Council will take a positive approach when considering development which reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Through this policy the Council will always seek to work proactively and jointly with applicants to find solutions which means the proposal can be approved wherever possible, and to secure proposals that improves economic, social and environmental conditions, and promotes health and well-being for those people living and working in Swindon Borough.
- 4.20 Through **Policy TR2** the Council will seek that development proposal are located where there is good public access in order to reduce the need to travel by car. The amplification to the Policy, at paragraph 4.197 of the Local Plan, states (inter alia) ***“in all cases development should provide a level of access that is appropriate to its location, and the type and nature of the vehicles that will use it”***.

4.21 **Policy EN5** deals with landscape character and historic landscapes and states: -

a. Proposals for development will only be permitted when:

- the intrinsic character, diversity and local distinctiveness of landscape within Swindon Borough are protected, conserved and enhanced;
- the design of the development and materials used are sympathetic to the surrounding landscape;
- unacceptable impacts upon the landscape are avoided; and,
- where other negative impacts are considered unavoidable, they are satisfactorily mitigated.

b. In meeting the requirements of EN5a, applicants for development should demonstrate how they have taken into account Landscape Character Assessments and assessed the potential impact of the proposal upon the following attributes of the landscape:

- existing landscape form, features, topography and character;
- the contribution of the landscape to biodiversity and wildlife;
- local geology and geo-diversity;
- views, visual amenity and the landscape setting;
- valuable historic and heritage areas and assets;
- environmental amenity such as tranquillity & noise, pollution and light pollution; and,
- the existing social, physical, economic and environmental roles and functions of the landscape at the local and strategic scale (for example as a place of cultural and leisure activity, living, employment and separation of settlements).

c. The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a nationally recognised area of landscape protection. Proposals within the Borough

which are within and or abuts the North Wessex Downs AONB must accord with relevant criteria set out in the AONB Management Plan and paragraph 115 and 116 of the NPPF. Proposals outside the AONB should not adversely affect its setting.

## MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

### National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.22 The National Planning Policy Framework was adopted by Central Government on 27th March 2012. Within the “Ministerial Foreword” it states that ***“the purpose of planning is to help achieve sustainable development”***. Further, the Ministerial Foreword notes that ***“sustainable means ensuring that better lives for ourselves don’t mean worse lives for future generations”***.
- 4.23 The Minister goes on to state ***“In order to fulfil its purpose of helping achieve sustainable development, planning must not simply be about scrutiny. Planning must be a creative exercise in finding ways to enhance and improve the places in which we live our lives. This should be a collective enterprise. Yet, in recent years, planning has tended to exclude, rather than to include, people and communities. In part, this has been a result of targets being imposed, and decisions taken, by bodies remote from them”***.
- 4.24 The document stipulates that ***“sustainable development is about positive growth - making economic environmental and social progress for this and future generations”***. Following on from this the Ministerial Foreword notes that ***“development that is sustainable should go ahead, without delay – a presumption in favour of sustainable development is the basis for every plan, and every decision”***.
- 4.25 The NPPF is clear that planning decisions must be made in accordance with Planning Law.
- 4.26 **Paragraph 2** states that planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Paragraph 2 continues note that that

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the National Planning Policy Framework ***“is a material consideration in planning decisions”***.

4.27 **Paragraph 7** confirms that there are three dimensions to sustainable development: Economic, Social and Environmental. These dimensions give rise to the need for the planning system to perform a number of roles (inter alia): -

- An Economic Role – contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements, including the provision of infrastructure;
- A Social Role – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities... with accessible local services that reflect the communities needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being; and
- An Environmental role – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment.

4.28 **Paragraph 8** advises that in order to achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system.

4.29 **Paragraph 10** notes that plans and decisions need to take local circumstances into account, so that they respond to the different opportunities for achieving sustainable development in different areas.

4.30 In applying the NPPF’s presumption in favour of sustainable development, and the test at **Paragraph 14** in particular with regards to decision taking; **it is duly noted that the proposed development accords with the development plan and as such the application should be approved without delay.**

4.31 **Paragraph 17** of the NPPF sets out 12 core land-use planning principles which should underline both plan-making and decision-taking. The land-use principles pertinent to the development proposal and development site are: -

- Take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all, and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs;
- Promote mixed use developments, and encourage multiple benefits from the use of land in urban and rural areas, recognising that some open land can perform many functions;
- encourage the effective use of land by reusing land that has been previously developed (brownfield land), provided that it is not of high environmental value;
- encourage the reuse of existing resources, including conversions of existing buildings; and
- proactively drive and support sustainable economic development and identify and then meet the development needs of an area, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth.

4.32 **Paragraph 19** confirms the Government's commitment to supporting sustainable economic growth and that *"planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth and therefore significant weight should be placed on the move to support economic growth through the planning system"*.

4.33 **Paragraph 28** duly promotes the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings. It states that planning policies should support economic growth to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable development.

4.34 On the issue of community involvement **Paragraph 66** identifies how local planning authorities should look more favourable upon proposals that take account of views of the community.

4.35 **Paragraphs 69 to 78** of the Framework specifically consider how the planning system can play an important role in facilitating and creating healthy communities. It states that great weight should be given to the need to create, expand or alter schools. The same must be true for other educational

establishments; such as that proposed through this development proposal. Indeed, it guides local planning authorities to take a proactive, positive and collaborative approach to development that will widen choice in education<sup>2</sup>.

- 4.36 As the site is washed over by the AONB, Paragraph 116 of the NPPF is specifically pertinent to this application and states: -

Planning permission should be refused for major developments in these designated areas [including AONBs] except in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated they are in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

- (i) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;
- (ii) the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and
- (iii) any detrimental effect on the environment, landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.

- 4.37 **Paragraph 197** of the NPPF repeats how local planning authorities should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

- 4.38 **Annex 2** of the Framework defines previously developed land as: -

Land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage of the developed land (although it should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage should be developed) and any associated fixed surface infrastructure. This excludes: land that is or has been occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings; land that has been developed for minerals extraction or waste disposal by landfill purposes where provision for restoration has been made through development control procedures; land in built-up areas such as private residential gardens, parks, recreation grounds and allotments; and land that was previously-

<sup>2</sup> The Framework, para 72.

developed but where the remains of the permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape in the process of time.”

- 4.39 Overall, the NPPF confirms that the primary objective of development management is to foster the delivery of sustainable development, not to hinder or prevent it. Local Authorities should approach development management decisions positively – looking for solutions rather than problems so that applications can be approved wherever it is practical to do so.
- 4.40 Under the NPPF, one of the core principles is the need to support and deliver healthier communities including widening the choice in education facilities. The application proposal would achieve both of those things.
- 4.41 The Government’s overarching vision throughout the NPPF is that the planning system does everything it can do to support sustainable economic growth whereby there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

**National Heritage Act 1983 (as amended)**

- 4.42 The SMG has a statutory obligation under the National Heritage Act 1983 (as amended) to care, preserve and add to the objects in their collection.
- 4.43 As defined in the 1983 National Heritage Act, SMG’s charitable objectives are to: -
- Care for, preserve and add to the objects in its collections;
  - Secure that the objects are exhibited to the public;
  - Secure that the objects are available to persons seeking to inspect them in connection with study or research; and
  - Generally, promote the public’s enjoyment and understanding of science and technology and of the development of those subjects, both by means of the Board’s collections and by such other means as they consider appropriate.

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### **The Mendoza Review: An Independent Review of Museums in England (November 2017)**

- 4.44 Commissioned and published by the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport; the Mendoza Review looked at the existing national infrastructure for museums in England and makes recommendations on how they should evolve.
- 4.45 The review identifies nine priorities for museums today, five of which are relevant to the development proposal these are (inter alia): -

Growing and diversifying audiences reflects the important purpose of museums in engaging people and communities. Over half of the adult population now visits museums – up from around two in five a decade ago – a significant achievement. But those audiences are still less likely to be representative of the very young or very old, ethnic minorities, disabled, or lower socio-economic backgrounds. There is no complacency in the sector – museums are increasingly reaching out to their communities to provide exhibitions that welcome people. These include, for example, building more sophisticated partnerships to co-produce exhibitions; using new technology to collect and analyse visitor data; and gathering other evidence to understand how best to serve their visitors. In many ways, national museums have spearheaded these approaches, and provided support to museums outside London to improve access all over the country. This work needs to continue and develop as further best-practice techniques are established and economies of scale established.

Dynamic collections curation and management are the fundamental point of museums – to protect and take care of the collections they hold, and to make them accessible to the public, not just physically, but meaningfully as well. This is not without its challenges: buildings maintenance backlogs (including insufficient storage) are a common issue, as is less available curatorial time and expertise, and the ongoing need for a sensible approach to both growing and rationalising collections. There are good examples of where sharing skills and infrastructure can help to overcome these issues; this is a particular area where a strategic framework for how the national museums' work with the rest of the sector will benefit museums across the country

Contributing to placemaking and local priorities helps museums play a part in

their communities and in local decision-making, as well as leveraging investment in culture to also deliver on priorities such as health and wellbeing. There is increasing evidence to show that cultural institutions contribute a great deal to the local economy, to the wellbeing and education of its residents, and to attracting tourists and businesses to the area. Museums are especially able to do this because of their position as a civic space and their collections, which connect people to place. To encourage this work it is important that museums have and use consistent, statistically robust methods to measure economic and social impact.

Delivering cultural education has benefits for schoolchildren as well as helping to make the adult museum audiences of the future. Museums can and do support pedagogy, enhancing the theory and practice of formal learning and the curriculum, as well as engaging children with development – particularly around their social history and place in the world.

Developing leaders with appropriate skills and diversifying the workforce are long-standing concerns of the museums sector; they must be tackled successfully if museums are to adapt to reduced public funding and encourage more diverse audiences. The skills needed for a museums career are changing, with greater emphasis now on flexibility and collaboration, business and digital, commercial, marketing and fundraising. Volunteers are still of crucial importance in keeping museums running, although routes to entry into the sector need to expand to offer greater opportunities to a wider range of people, particularly reflecting the make-up of the local communities they serve.

Digital capacity and innovation is an area where museums have been slower than other arts and cultural sectors to develop. Beginning with senior leadership, but encompassing upskilling people in numerous roles, there is a need for greater understanding of the wide potential of digital in museums. Examples include display and interpretation, collections, communications, data – and the need for a strategic approach to embedding tools and technologies into every aspect of museums' work.

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### The Culture White Paper March 2016

- 4.46 The white paper sets out how the Government will support the cultural sector over the coming years and how culture will play an active role in building a fairer and more prosperous nation. Page 38 of the white paper states (inter alia) ***“Many museums are actively involved in digitising their collections, but still only a fraction of the extensive and unique collections of our national museums can be readily viewed by the general public. The government is providing £150 million of capital funding over the next five years to the British Museum, the Science Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum to preserve, protect and transform public access to the collections currently stored at Blythe House in London, by relocating them to appropriate, world-class facilities. As part of this move, objects from the collections will be photographed and made available digitally”.***

### Written Ministerial Statement Planning for Growth

- 4.47 On 23 March 2011, the Chancellor of the Exchequer issued a call to action on growth, and published the Written Ministerial Statement on ‘*Planning for Growth*’<sup>3</sup> which presented an ambitious set of proposals to help rebuild Britain’s economy. The Ministerial Statement emphasised how the planning system has a key role to play in this, by ensuring that the sustainable development needed to support economic growth is able to proceed as easily as possible. Government’s clear expectation is that the answer to sustainable development and growth should wherever possible be ‘yes’.
- 4.48 The Written Statement states ***“The planning system has a key role to play in this, by ensuring that the sustainable development needed to support economic growth is able to proceed as easily as possible. We will work quickly to reform the planning system to achieve this, but the Government recognises that many of these actions will take some months to deliver, and that there is a pressing need to ensure that the planning system does everything it can to help secure a swift return to economic growth.”***

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<sup>3</sup> The Written Ministerial Statement dated 23 March 2011 was presented within a Letter to Chief Planning Officer ‘*Planning for Growth*’ dated 31 March 2011 (document has not been replaced by the NPPF).

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4.49 The Statement also confirms that: *"When deciding whether to grant planning permission, local planning authorities should support enterprise and facilitate economic and other forms of sustainable development"*.

**Wroughton Neighbourhood Plan 2016 – 2026 (April 2016)**

4.50 The Wroughton Neighbourhood Plan is at an advanced stage whereby the Report of the Independent Examiner to Swindon Borough Council on the Wroughton Neighbourhood Plan was published on 4 April 2016. Paragraph 1.2 of the Plan identifies how the objectives and views within the plan have come from ideas, views and opinions of Wroughton's residents who have engaged in the plan making process.

4.51 Paragraph 1.5 goes on to identify the visions that shape the plan, those pertinent to the application proposal and application site are set out below, these are: -

- Encourage development of brownfield land and the use of derelict sites;
- Maintain and encourage improvements to educational facilities; and
- Support and enhance the local economy.

4.52 The development proposal would contribute towards all these requirements.

4.53 **Policy LE5** of the Neighbourhood Plan replicates Policy RA2 of the Local Plan and encourages the expansion of Science Museum related activities and enabling development.

4.54 The Building ONE facility will become a key accessible facility within the local community and which will support local engagement with the collections, further integrate the site within the community and provide additional community facilities. It is clear the development proposal is aligned with one of the key visions of the Wroughton Neighbourhood Plan 2026.

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## 5. MAIN PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 This section of the statement examines the various material considerations to assist in the determining the acceptability of the application proposal. These considerations have been derived from an understanding of the site and its surrounds and the policy analysis of the previous section. These are themed as: -

- Principle of Development
- Heritage
- Landscape and Visual
- Localism
- Other

5.2 Each theme is discussed in turn below.

### **Principle of Development**

5.3 The SMG has a statutory obligation under the National Heritage Act 1983 (as amended) to care, preserve and add to the objects in their collection.

5.4 The Wroughton site is already acknowledged as a primary collections storage facility for the SMG. A second site, at Blythe House in West Kensington, London, is leased from the Government by SMG and provides alternative storage for 320,000 objects of historical, international significance of the collection. However, the Government's decision to sell Blythe House now presents the opportunity for the SMG to make significant progress towards its vision of relocating the inadequate Blythe House stores to a purpose-built facility at Wroughton.

5.5 Policy RA2 gives explicit support for development proposals that seek to maximise the opportunities associated with the SMG to the benefit of Wroughton and the Borough throughout. In addition, the Policy is firmly supported by Wroughton Parish Council<sup>4</sup> who in turn carried over this vision to their Wroughton Neighbourhood Plan 2016 to 2026 (adopted April 2016). As stated elsewhere in

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<sup>4</sup> REPORT ON THE EXAMINATION INTO THE SWINDON BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN dated 5 February 2015, paragraph 196

this statement, the policy objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan are all derived from the views and opinions of Wroughton's residents who have engaged in the plan making process.

- 5.6 The development will bring clear economic benefits to Wroughton and the surrounding area and it is expected that the positive economic impact will be important at the local level during the construction and subsequent operation of the collections management facility.
- 5.7 The development will provide employment and business opportunities for component suppliers / installers and those involved in construction, transport and logistics. Where possible through the procurement regime, local businesses will be contracted for relevant parts of the scope of works over the period of construction, such as labour, construction materials, and plant. There will be additional induced impacts during the construction period with any incoming construction workers (engineers, project managers etc) spending their wages at a local level (restaurants, retail stores etc) and using local accommodation. The wider 'knock-on' effects can in turn support the supply chain of other activities such as the spending habits of retail operations and accommodation providers.
- 5.8 Once operational, the staffing levels at the site will increase from 20 on site staff to circa 50 site staff. This will include a wider variety of skilled roles from educational officers to conservation officers. This would provide a significant boost to employment at a local level.
- 5.9 Additional financial benefits that will be delivered as part of the scheme include the resultant taxes (including corporation Tax, Employer National Insurance, Irrecoverable VAT, Income Tax, Employee National Insurance and non-domestic business rates). Whilst these exchequer impacts have not been quantified they duly provide economic benefits.
- 5.10 Furthermore, the extant Development Plan, at paragraph 4.294 identifies how ***"The Science Museum at Wroughton is also an important visitor attraction and heritage asset. The Borough Council supports development in support of the museum activities as long as they are in line with the sustainability principles and in accordance with other policies in this plan as set out in Policy RA2"***.

5.11 Overall, there is no doubt that the expansion of the SMG related activities is fully supported at both the Council and community level and this includes the provision of the collections management facility.

### **Archaeology and Heritage**

5.12 The likely effects of the application proposal upon any potential archaeological remains located within the application site and the setting of designated heritage assets located within the wider surrounds are assessed within Chapter 7 of the accompanying Environmental Statement. The salient points are set out below. Importantly, the ES chapter only considers the physical features that are found in the landscape. It does not consider the significant benefits to the care of the collection managed by SMG, itself an internationally important collection of heritage items, as part of their statutory. That this collection is currently housed in inappropriate conditions in structures not designed for the specialist task they perform is relevant to the wider planning balance if support of the development proposal.

- Previous archaeological investigations within the application site and in its environs revealed the presence of buried archaeological remains associated with prehistoric and later activity. These included early Iron Age settlement features, linear features of Iron Age/Romano-British origin, as well as shallow linear features, which could have been associated with Bronze Age activity (although later, perhaps post-medieval origin, is also possible). It is likely that further remains of later prehistoric or Romano-British date may be encountered within the Application Site.
- The application site appears to have been located within agricultural landscape, likely from the early medieval period until the establishment of Wroughton Airfield, and therefore there is the potential for the presence of features associated with agricultural practices. Buried remains associated with former dwellings of post-medieval or modern date, recorded on historic maps, as well as features associated with Wroughton Airfield, established in 1939, may also be present.
- The potential for the development to affect the significance of designated heritage assets within the environs of the Application Site was assessed, including eight Grade II Listed Buildings within 1km of the Application Site

and a number of Scheduled Monuments in the wider landscape. It has been established that the development would not affect the majority of the designated heritage assets, although a small number of Scheduled Monuments were selected for a more detailed assessment, including: Barbury Castle: a Hillfort and Bowl Barrow Scheduled Monument; Three Bowl Barrows: Part of the Barrow Cemetery west of Barbury Castle and Saucer Barrow: Part of the Barrow Cemetery west of Barbury Castle Scheduled Monuments; and Two Bowl Barrows 680m North of Upper Herdswick Farm, Barbury Down Scheduled Monument.

- It has been established that the development has the potential to affect known archaeological remains associated with an early Iron Age settlement and with Iron Age or Romano-British linear features, as well as potential previously unrecorded archaeological remains. Stripping and excavations associated with the construction of the proposed new building (and any associated landscaping or services) have the potential to truncate or totally remove the archaeological remains within their footprint.
- It has been established that the development would not affect the significance of the designated heritage assets located within the environs of the Application Site. It has been ascertained that whilst the new building to be erected will become perceptible in views from a number of Scheduled Monuments (including Barbury Castle, the Barrow Cemetery and Two Bowl Barrows), this Proposed Development would not change the character of the wider surroundings of the assets and as such the character of their settings in which they can be experienced would remain unchanged.
- It has been established that the development would not lead to harm to any designated heritage assets located in the vicinity of the Application Site, including the Scheduled Barbruy Castle and barrows, and no further mitigation with regard to these assets is required.
- It has been ascertained that there will be no effects associated with the development on archaeological remains recorded within areas outside of the footprint of the new building (and any associated excavations, i.e. for

services), leading to Neutral Effect. No additional mitigation measures are necessary with regard to these remains.

- 5.13 The development has the potential to affect known archaeological remains associated with an early Iron Age settlement and with Iron Age or Romano-British linear features, as well as potential previously unrecorded archaeological remains. As it has been ascertained that these remains would not be of the highest heritage significance, mitigation through preservation in situ would not be required and any harm could be satisfactorily mitigated by preservation by record. It has been proposed that a proportionate programme of archaeological survey and mitigation, by means of field investigation and recording, would be agreed in liaison with the archaeological advisor. The results of the previous archaeological evaluation, the Heritage Assessment and geophysical survey (underway) would inform the need for further evaluation and mitigation, which would comprise preservation by record at an appropriate stage in the development process. For the archaeological remains the mitigation may include, as appropriate, excavation, strip map and sample investigation, or archaeological monitoring of ground works during construction (known as a watching brief), with appropriate post-excavation analysis and dissemination of results. It is considered that appropriate mitigation would partially offset the harm to the archaeological remains through the knowledge gained through the investigations.
- 5.14 Turning to the remnants structures of the former airfield, English Heritage's booklet 'Historic Military Aviation Sites: Conservation management guidance' (2003) records that it carried out *"a thorough review of England's 20th century military heritage, including studies of airfields, airfield defences and Cold War monuments. A thematic survey report of military aviation sites and structures, first issued as a consultation document in 2000, has identified approximately 170 buildings and structures deemed worthy of listing at 33 separate sites."* Wroughton was considered and said after Kemble to be *"the best example of an airfield landscape"* but neither Wroughton itself nor any of the individual military structures at the site were recommended for designation. The implications of this are clear, Wroughton was studied by the EH designation team and whilst they recognised that it was a good example of its type, they did not conclude that it, or any of its components, were of a quality or significance that warranted protection through designation.

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## Landscape and Visual

- 5.15 The landscape and visual considerations are fully addresses within Chapter 6 of the accompanying Environmental statement. The salient points are summarised below.

### *Landscape Features*

- 5.16 The existing land use of the site is currently an area of managed grassland within a former airfield, now in use by SMG.

### *Landscape Character*

- 5.17 The existing character of the site is one which is developed in nature with former military infrastructure, including a number of adjacent former hangar buildings, which are very similar in nature to the development. This existing infrastructure serves to influence the character of the site and surrounding area such that the character continues to be perceived as that of a former airfield, notwithstanding the location of the site within the AONB.

### *Visual Amenity*

- 5.18 The number of residential properties which offer the potential for residents to experience views towards the development in close proximity to the site are very limited.

### *Effects on Landscape*

- 5.19 The development would represent a change to the current land use from an area of managed grassland to a collections management facility resulting in a moderate level of effect to current land use, which is considered non-significant. It is important to appreciate that a localised magnitude of change to land use such as this is an inevitable consequence of the development of the development of a collections management facility such as this and that the adverse effect identified is of a scale which is typical of other similar developments throughout the UK.

### *Landscape Character*

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- 5.20 The development would be of a type which is similar in nature to the existing hangar buildings at the SMGW site, but lower in height, and this would serve to limit the potential for the development to result in any notable impact to the character of the landscape.
- 5.21 Effects relate to the change in the current land use from an area of managed grassland to a collections management facility. Notwithstanding that the site itself is currently managed grassland, given the existing airfield character of the site and the close proximity of the existing large scale former hangar buildings, the magnitude of change is assessed as low to medium resulting in a minor to moderate level of effect on the character of the site and its immediate environs, which is not significant.
- 5.22 The Avebury Plain character area extends across the full extent of the 5km study area in both directions from the site. Given the limited scale and nature of the development, the potential for any impact to the character of the landscape would be limited to only a small part of the character area, localised to the immediate environs of the site.
- 5.23 The Marlborough Downs character area is an expansive area of undulating chalk plateau extending north of the Kennet River Valley, with its boundaries defined by the elevated topography and Upper Chalk geology. This scarp and vale topography is such that elevated views of the site at the former airfield are gained from the northernmost edge of the character area, as part of a wide panorama of views, which include the solar energy development in the southern part of the former airfield and the built-up area of Swindon and the M4 corridor beyond.
- 5.24 In general, from this distance (at least 2.5km) a notable change in landscape character can already be discerned between the former airfield/ military site and the wider Downs Plain and Scarp character area in which it is located.
- 5.25 In the context of the existing difference between the character of the former airfield site and the remainder of the Downs Plain and Scarp landscape, the potential for there to be any effect on the character of the Marlborough Downs character area is limited. Whilst the sensitive nature of this part of the AONB landscape is acknowledged the magnitude of change on the character of the Marlborough Downs that would be brought about by the development would be

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no more than very low, resulting in a minor to negligible level of effect, which is not significant.

*Effects on Visual Amenity*

- 5.26 The Ridgeway National Trail is located approximately 2.5km to the south of the site at its closest point as the route follows the northernmost section of the Marlborough Downs. When viewed from the Ridgeway, the development would be contained within the envelope of the existing former airfield site, which, by the scale of the existing infrastructure, is currently a notable visual element in the baseline landscape. Given the sensitivity of the Ridgeway as a National Trail, although the new building would result in no more than a low impact on the view, this would represent a minor-moderate visual effect, which is not significant. However, the ability to understand and appreciate the view from the route would not be harmed to any significant degree, and this section of the Ridgeway would continue to remain a pleasant and enjoyable route to walk.
- 5.27 There would be a limited number of further rights of way from which the proposals would be visible, generally those located on the scarp slope where views are more elevated. However, in all cases the development would appear as a minor addition to the existing infrastructure at the former airfield, resulting in no more than minor to negligible visual effects, which are not significant.
- 5.28 Due to the high degree of screening by topography and vegetation present around the site, the number of roads from which motorists and passengers are likely to experience views is very limited. The only routes that would have the potential to experience more than a glimpse of the site would be the minor roads which run northwards down off the Marlborough Downs. The new building would appear as a minor additional element alongside the existing infrastructure at the former airfield. Whilst noticeable, the potential for new visual impacts to arise to the users of the roads would be limited, with no more than minor visual effects arising, which are not significant.

*Mitigation and Enhancement*

- 5.29 The proposed landscape and visual mitigation has been implemented by design, in the form of the orientation of the building, its scale and its external treatment

(colour) As such all effects described above are residual effects, taking into account these measures.

- 5.30 To summarise, it is important to appreciate that some effect on landscape character and visual amenity is an inherent consequence of a new development of this type and scale. However, in this case any potential for adverse effects is limited by the existing infrastructure already located at the former airfield site, as well as vegetation and topography in the landscape. Those limited effects which have been identified therefore need to be balanced against the other benefits of the proposed development.

### **Localism and Community Consultation**

- 5.31 Local public opinion has a statutory role to play in the formulation of development plan and neighbourhood documents through the process of community involvement/engagement and is a material consideration in the making of a planning decision. The introduction of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and more recently the Localism Act 2010 has escalated the role of the 'Big Society' whereby Government actively encourage local communities to take charge of local planning decisions. The applicant designed and delivered a comprehensive pre-application consultation programme with the local community and engaged with local community and key stakeholders.
- 5.32 The consultation programme has attracted very substantial involvement from the local community and local stakeholders. The comprehensive communications programme, which included two public exhibitions, leaflet drop, press release and presentations to local stakeholder groups has assisted SMG in raising the awareness to the project and ensuring that many details about it are known. This is demonstrated by strong community support for the proposals where over 99% of feedback received expressed support for the project. This verifies that there is a solid platform of unparalleled support for the development proposal at a local community level and represents the special circumstances which must be duly considered and taken into account by the local planning authority and statutory consultees during their consideration of this application proposal.
- 5.33 This level of community support exhibited by those who attended the drop-in events should weigh in favour the scheme and must be duly taken into account by the local planning authority and statutory consultees during their consideration

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of this application. Full details of the community consultation is presented within the accompanying Statement of Community Engagement.

### **Transport and Traffic**

5.34 The vehicular movements to be generated by the application have been assessed in the supporting Transport Statement which confirms: -

- There will be traffic associated with the delivery and collection of objects stored at the facility and this will reflect current site operations. The additional transport impacts would be minimal and this is reflected in the layout design, which only provides a single loading bay.
- Visitors would arrive by a combination of personal vehicles, coaches and public transport. There would be approximately 35 additional vehicles arriving at the site each day, primarily in off-peak times.
- The site is accessible by public transport, providing opportunities for staff and visitors to travel in a sustainable manner. The majority of visitors however, would visit the facility as a part of an organised event and are more likely to arrive by coach or as part of a large party.
- The TS confirmed that there is no evidence to suggest that the development would have an adverse effect on road safety or the number of accidents in the vicinity.

5.35 In light of the above, it can be assumed that the development will not have a material impact on the local highways network and would not give rise to any highways related issues.

### **Ecology**

5.36 The application is supported by an extended phase 1 ecological survey undertaken by Clarkson and Woods Ltd. The objectives of the survey were to identify any potential constraints associated with the development and provide recommendations for further surveys and mitigation to avoid or reduce impacts on species or habitats as deemed necessary.

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- 5.37 The survey area predominantly comprised expanses of managed grassland between former hardstanding runways. The habitat within the development footprint is deemed to be of relatively low intrinsic value for biodiversity and in view of the extent of this habitat within the surrounding landscape its loss is not considered to be significant.
- 5.38 Clouts Wood SSSI is located approximately 100m north of the development footprint at the closest point. Due to the distance from this SSSI and the scale of the development, impacts on this designated site are considered unlikely to occur. The site may be used by ground nesting birds. Whilst the loss of a small area is unlikely to result in significant impacts upon local populations there is potential for cumulative impacts when the effects of this habitat loss are combined with change already experienced to the south of the site, within the solar array. Compensation for habitat loss can also be designed and implemented to reduce potential cumulative effects.
- 5.39 It seems likely that a successful scheme can be devised that will ensure that biodiversity is protected and appropriate compensation designed where protection cannot be achieved. As such the proposed development can be considered in line with planning policies EN1 and EN4.

## 6. Exceptional Circumstances (NPPF Paragraph 116 Test)

6.1 The proposal constitutes major development in an AONB and thud must satisfy paragraph 116 of the NPPF. This involves considering a number of matters:

- The impact of the development if permitted, in particular any impacts on *“the environment, landscape and recreational opportunities”*
- Whether there are *“exceptional circumstances”* in the public interest, and which also involves consideration of *“the need for development”* including *“any national considerations”*; and
- The scope to develop outside the AONB or meet any need in some other way.

6.2 Before turning to consider each of these matters, it is important to acknowledge that the NPPF does not provide a definition of *“exceptional circumstances”*. The decision of Sullivan J. in *R (Basildon DC) v FSS [2004] EWHC 2759 (Admin)* established that in relation to Very Special Circumstances (“VSC”) in Green Belt cases *“a number of factors, none of them “very special”, when considered in isolation may, when combined together, amount to very special circumstances”*. The same must be true for the purposes of establishing *“exceptional circumstances”* under para. 116 of the NPPF. Thus, for example, in this case the uniqueness of the site, local economic benefits and public opening days may not in themselves amount to exceptional circumstances but they can contribute to establishing such.

### **The Environment, Landscape and Recreational Opportunities**

6.3 Detailed consideration of the first bullepoint, with regards to impact on *“the environment, landscape and recreational opportunities”* is considered in detail through the supporting Environmental Statement and summarised in Section 5 of this Statement, it is therefore not repeated here. As a summary, the evidence contained in the planning application confirms that whilst there would be localised effects upon visual amenity, landscape character and heritage assets as a result of the proposal, the development would not result in a level of effect upon heritage assets or landscape within the AONB which in their own rights would warrant refusal of the proposal. A key issue in terms of context is the existing development already present on the SMGW site, and the impact of this on the

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baseline of any assessment of visual and character impacts arising from the application proposal.

### **Need for Development and Exceptional Circumstances**

- 6.4 The matters that contribute to the need of the development along with the broader issues of 'exceptional circumstances' and 'public interest' are discussed in turn below.

#### *Need for Development*

- 6.5 As stated elsewhere in this statement, the Culture White Paper states how the Government is providing funding to the Science Museum Group to preserve, protect and transform public access to the collections currently stored at Blythe House in London, by relocating them to appropriate, world-class facilities. In the SMGs case to its existing premises at Wroughton.
- 6.6 The existing limitations to these objectives, with sensitive objects stored in unsatisfactory conditions in existing hangars at the site [and need to vacate their current store at Blythe House by March 2023] have been recognised as prime drivers behind the need to proceed with the current proposal.

#### *The Unique Nature of the Site and Applicant*

- 6.7 The SMG land holdings at Wroughton, of which the application site forms part of, are clearly unique and this contributes towards the exceptional circumstances required for the purpose of paragraph 116 of the NPPF. The SMGW site has its own policy, unique on the whole of the North Wessex Downs AONB, because it encourages further built development for Science Museum purposes, indeed Policy RA2 seeks to maximise opportunities for development of Science Museum operations including the expansion of museum activities, the policy goes further by saying only that the AONB context needs to be "*taken into account*".
- 6.8 The entire site is also regarded as previously developed land. That is land on which development is generally encouraged. In policy terms brownfield land is sequentially preferable to greenfield land.
- 6.9 The applicant is also unique, the development will improve the storage and management of SMG collections, making it easier to retrieve and distribute the

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objects for public exhibition within SMG museums and on loan world-wide.. Thus the application will facilitate the SMG in the performance of its duties under the National Heritage Act 1983.

- 6.10 Given that the SMGW has a specific land holding, they are unlike other developers who can consider alternative sites as part of their scheme development process. The cost and scope of developing elsewhere is not an option for the SMG since it will not secure the financial model required to allow it to properly manage its collections for the enjoyment of our and future generations. Furthermore, the nature of the site itself lends exceptional benefits to the storage and management of the national collections including; low risk of flooding, clean air and the existing secure boundary. It is also pertinent that the accessibility to the national road network, minimised relocation and transport costs and availability of existing infrastructure (such as internal site roads, offices etc) reduces the cost impact of this project on the public purse.
- 6.11 Finally, the unique nature of the application site within the AONB is borne out by its planning history, this includes the outline planning application for the storage, conservation and display of the collections in an educational and inspirational manner; incorporating the phased delivery of a purpose-built national collections centre with ancillary catering, retailing and accommodation facilities; sustainable business enterprise and sustainable research and development. Whilst the application was subsequently withdrawn due to insufficient development funds, the application was considered by the Planning Committee on 23 May 2006 whereby it was resolved that the Director of Planning be authorised to grant planning permission following completion of procedural matters.

#### *Community Support*

- 6.12 The local support also demonstrates the public interest that prevails at the local level which contributes towards the exceptional circumstances driving this development proposal.
- 6.13 Local public opinion has a statutory role to play in the formulation of development plan and neighbourhood documents through the process of community involvement/engagement and is a material consideration in the making of a planning decision. The introduction of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and more recently the Localism Act 2010 has escalated the role of the 'Big

Society' whereby Government actively encourage local communities to take charge of local planning decisions. This level of community support exhibited by those who attended the drop-in events should weigh in favour the proposed scheme and must be duly taken into account by the local planning authority and statutory consultees during their consideration of this application proposal. Full details of the community consultation is presented within the accompanying Statement of Community Engagement.

*Development for the Science Museum Group to assist in the preservation of other collections*

- 6.14 The relocation of these objects and the potential for other national institutions to store their objects at Wroughton continues to raise the profile of the site as a location of international significance in the heritage sector and this itself contributes towards the exceptional circumstances.
- 6.15 The relocation of the objects and collections from Blythe House in West Kensington is a necessity. This is due to the sale of Blythe House by the Government. The entire premises must be vacated by March 2023. This includes the stored collections of the other tenants of the premises - the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum. Due to the complexity of the building, need for three museums to relocate simultaneously and the fragility & significance of the objects, the relocation programme is protracted. SMG must start this element of the programme in the spring of 2020, to meet the Government's deadline for vacant possession. Therefore, the new facilities need to be complete, and operational, by January 2020 to acclimatise and facilitate mobilisation prior to first movement of the objects.
- 6.16 SMG's vision to develop this site and expand its ambitions in the creation of a national collection centre providing storage and management for its collection has already been supported by the Secretary of State for DCLG in his Decision Letter [and Inspector's Report] relating to the Swindon Solar Farm. As part of SMG evidence for the solar park it was identified how the existing infrastructure at the site does not provide the correct standards for storage and the refurbishment and new build offer the only solutions to SMG aspirations. This project is therefore the realisation of a once-in-generation opportunity to create essential new facilities at Wroughton.

- 6.17 The new building will allow the SMG to relocate the objects contained within the site's life-expired hangars. The structures, and materials from which the hangars were constructed, are now at end of life – the concrete hangars are spalling concrete as the reinforcing bar within the castings corrodes and expands, creating a safety risk for people and the collections. The vast steel doors have rusted through in places and are inoperable in many of the hangars. The roofs on the hangars are losing their bitumen-sheet coverings and bad weather often results in leaks within the buildings. Drainage from the roofs and soak-a-ways are now blocked and inaccessible in many locations, causing localised flooding in and around buildings. Most of the brick-built ancillary buildings have leaks around parapet walls. The tarmac capping on roads and runways is cracked and missing in places. These issues are a major concern to SMG given the importance of what is stored at the site and the requirements placed on SMG under the National Heritage Act 1983 (as amended). Due to the deteriorating infrastructure within the SMGW site, the quantity of objects that can be retrieved from the stores and placed on display is limited with the larger items effectively entombed in the hangars as the doors cannot open.
- 6.18 By relocating the collection from the existing hangars to the new facility SMG provide optimal storage conditions for the collection and allow the vacated dilapidated hangars to be properly refurbished for reuse. This cannot be achieved if the collections remain in situ. Investment in a new building will make it easier to store, distribute and therefore display more of the collections at national museums and loans to other institutions. Absent of such investment and objects will increasingly become entombed in the existing hangars on site.
- 6.19 It was also acknowledged during the Swindon Solar Park Inquiry that the northern and eastern clusters of buildings represent the most important areas of the site for the development of new storage facilities. The application proposal accords with this vision.

*Public Interest*

- 6.20 The new facility will transform the SMG collection into a unique, flexible and accessible learning resource (available free of charge to teachers and their students), create efficiencies in the way the objects can be used for exhibition within the Groups museums and beyond, and facilitate extensive, well managed,

inspiring physical access. The digitised collection will complement galleries and programmes across the SMG museums and, crucially, reach those who are unable to physically visit.

- 6.21 The development is considered to be an acceptable form of development at this location as it allows SMG to move forward towards maximising the opportunities of the site that will benefit this and future generations of Wroughton and the wider Swindon Borough. For these reasons, it is unquestionable that the development proposal accords with the dominant local plan policies, namely Policies RA2, SD1, CM5 and EN5.

**The Scope to Develop Outside the AONB or Meet any need in Some Other Way.**

- 6.22 Given that the SMG have a specific land holding at Wroughton, they are unlike a commercial developer who can consider alternative sites as part of their scheme development process. The cost and scope of developing elsewhere is not an option for SMG since it will not secure the financial model required to allow it to preserve, conserve and engage its stored collections for the enjoyment of our and future generations. Without planning permission being granted for the application proposal, it is clear that the benefits, which are of national (and international importance, including the ability to increase public access to SMGW, cannot be realised.
- 6.23 In terms of establishing a planning balance, section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act requires that all planning applications are determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material consideration(s) indicate otherwise. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 of this statement sets out how the application proposals are in accordance with the Development Plan when judged against the key relevant policies as a whole.
- 6.24 This approach to construing policy is endorsed in case law judgments; notably that of Sullivan J in Rochdale (R v Rochdale MBC ex parte Milne [2001] reported at 81 P&CR 365). In this case, Sullivan J concluded that in assessing compliance with the development plan it is not necessary to comply with all policies; there will be some core or site specific policies that take precedence over others.

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6.25 The Framework also states at paragraph 14 that local planning authorities should positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of their area and approve development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay. Or where the relevant policies are out-of-date, grant permission unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework as a whole or where specific policies in the Framework indicate development should be restricted (in this case development has satisfied paragraph 116 of the Framework).

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## 7. CONCLUSION

- 7.1 For the reasons outlined in this Planning Statement, it is considered that the application proposals are entirely consistent with the relevant planning policies and guidance at the local and national levels.
- 7.2 The Wroughton site is already acknowledged as a primary storage facility for the SMG. A second site, at Blythe House in West Kensington, London, is leased from the Government by SMG and provides inadequate storage for 320,000 objects of historical, international significance of the collection. However, the Government's decision to sell Blythe House now presents the opportunity for the SMG to make significant progress towards its vision of relocating the objects in the inadequate Blythe House stores, and the life expired hangars, into a purpose-built facility at Wroughton, and creating a national collections centre that provides an exceptional national resource for use by the public physically and online. This project will also allow SMG through a later programme of works to refurbish the hangars for re-use. The Local Plan seeks to maximise the opportunities associated with the SMG site to the benefit of Wroughton and the Borough by allowing expansion of museum relates activities and enabling development providing the benefits of the development are delivered in a sustainable way and do not conflict with other polices of the plan.
- 7.3 The delivery of a purpose-built collections management facility, which is of national importance, would secure tangible benefits for Wroughton and the wider Borough and represents a significant case in favour of the application proposal.
- 7.4 Overall, the proposals are entirely suitable to the site and its surrounds; consistent with Planning Policy and all relevant material planning considerations; and will achieve a high-quality design as envisaged by the applicant and as required by the Local Planning Authority.