

BUILDING ONE

SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP AT WROUGHTON

Environmental Statement Non-Technical Summary

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**Co-ordinated by Pegasus
Group**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Science Museum Group (hereafter referred as "SMG") is developing a collections management facility on land at the Science Museum Group at Wroughton (hereafter referred as "SMGW").

Background to SMG and Development

1.2 SMG comprises: -

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

1.3 SMG holds the nation's preeminent collection of science, technology, engineering, medicine, transport and media. The SMG's mission to inspire futures includes bringing the management of it's 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 lifetime 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.

1.5 SMG must vacate Blythe House by the end of March 2023 due to the sale of that premises. 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.

What is Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Statement

- 1.6 An Environmental Impact Assessment is a systematic and objective process through which the possible significant environmental effects of a project can be identified, assessed and mitigated insofar as reasonably practicable. This process and its outcomes are then reported in the Environmental Statement to decision makers, Swindon Borough Council and its advisors, and the public. The Non-Technical Summary is provided to allow a wider public understanding of the environmental effects of the project. Based on the expert knowledge of the consultant team, the technical topics assessed as part of the process were landscape and visual impact; and cultural heritage.
- 1.7 This NTS covers all disciplines assessed in the ES.

2. DEVELOPMENT SITE

- 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. 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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 Vehicular access to the site is currently provided via an existing priority T-junction at Red Barn Gate from the A4361 Devizes Road. 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.
- 2.4 There are no designated heritage assets within the site. There are a number of Scheduled monuments within the wider environs of the Site, these include: -
- 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.
- 2.5 The site lies towards the northernmost boundary of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, lying just over 1km from the edge of the AONB which runs along the southern edge of Wroughton following the dip in the landform at the foot of the Downs.
- 2.6 The geology is understood to comprise topsoil directly overlying chalk material.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT

3.1 The development relates to the erection of a collections management facility with an overall building size of approximately 289m by 92m. The development 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 Table below show how the building will be subdivided: -

<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
Total		Mezzanine 9,274 sq m
		Building GIA 26,394 sq m

Vision

- 3.3 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

- 3.4 The development 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

- 3.5 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

- 3.6 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

- 3.7 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.

- 3.8 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 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.

Access

- 3.9 The development will utilise the existing access arrangements, namely the cross road junction without signal control at Red Barn Gate from the A4361 Devizes Road. 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).
- 3.10 Visitors would arrive by a combination of personal vehicles, coaches and public transport. There would be approximately 35 additional vehicle trips for the site, arriving and departing each day primarily in off-peak times. Traffic associated with the collections management of objects stored at the Building ONE facility would reflect current site operations.
- 3.11 The construction phase is expected to take up to 12 months. Three potential routes from the M4 motorway will be discussed with Swindon Borough Council during the determination period, these are: -
- Route A: M4 junction 16 - B4005 Wharf Road - A4361 W to the site;
 - Route B: M4 junction 16 - Hay Lane - A4361 E to the site; and
 - Route C: M4 junction 16 - A3102 - A4361 to the site.

Staffing

- 3.12 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.
- 3.13 The development layout is provided at **Appendix 1**.

4. CULTURE, HERITAGE AND PLANNING CONTEXT

National Heritage Act 1983

- 4.1 SMG was established under the National Heritage Act 1983 with its own Board of Trustees. It has the status of a non-departmental public body, operating within the public sector but at arm's length from its sponsor department, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).
- 4.2 This legislation sets out the principles by which the SMG takes responsibility for, an ensuring that there are effective arrangements for, collections information management and access to the SMG Collection.
- 4.3 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.

The Culture White Paper March 2016

- 4.4 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.*"

National Planning Policy

- 4.5 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 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"*.
- 4.6 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"*.
- 4.7 The NPPF is clear that planning decisions must be made in accordance with Planning Law. 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 that:- *"Planning policies and decisions must reflect and where appropriate promote relevant EU obligations and statutory requirements"*. The relevant statutory requirements here include the National Heritage Act 1983.

The Swindon Borough Local Plan 2026 (adopted March 2015)

- 4.8 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. The development plan provides a specific land use policy which seeks to maximise opportunities associated with the Science Museum to benefit Wroughton and the Borough by allowing, amongst other things, an expansion of museum related activities and enabling development providing the benefits of the development are delivered sustainably.

5. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL

- 5.1 Chapter 6 of the Environmental Statement has assessed the likely effects of the proposed development on landscape character, landscape features and elements within and in the immediate vicinity of the development, and on local visual amenity. The assessment has been undertaken by a Chartered Landscape Architect, with regard to best practice. Particularly the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment as published by IEMA and the Landscape Institute.
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 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.

6. CULTURAL HERITAGE

6.1 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 Environmental Statement.

6.2 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 duty. 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;
- 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;
- 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: and, Part of the Barrow Cemetery west of Barbury Castle Scheduled Monuments; and
- 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.

- 6.3 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.