A preliminary report, commissioned by The British Museum in the spring of 2015, to comment on the findings of the surveys and feedback from the initial work and consultations of the Museum of the future initiative. The report sets these early findings in the context of other recent initiatives and makes recommendations for next steps and future activities.

November 2015
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Executive Summary

The British Museum has spent the past year working on the Museum of the future (Motf) initiative – an unprecedented engagement process created to achieve a deeper understanding of people’s thoughts and opinions about the Museum’s role and purpose now and into the future as the Nation’s leading visitor attraction. The Motf initiative is also generating ideas for addressing the challenges of rising visitor numbers, heightened security needs and the ever-growing expectations of the digital age. The British Museum aims to offer every visitor the best possible experience to interact with the collection, on every occasion and in every way. Motf is beginning to show how that might be achieved.

This report marks a significant milestone in this ambitious programme and draws together the substantial information that has been generated by the successful first phase of the Motf’s engagement exercise. The analysis provides clear recommendations for action to address some long-standing visitor concerns and it also helps inform the Museum’s priorities for consideration and investment over the longer term. The Motf initiative will help The British Museum deliver a modern museum that will be truly fit for a long and sustainable future, not just in London but around the country and worldwide.

This report draws on a wide range of visitor survey feedback, along with more qualitative data from the staff consultation workshops and the headline public debates at the heart of the initial stage of the Motf exercise. Several other sources of external and internal data were also used to provide context.

The report analyses material from:

- 1,427 feedback questionnaires (see appendix a) and the transcripts from the three main Motf public engagement events
- The Museum’s Learning and National Partnerships department’s ongoing community engagement programme
- Online and social media dialogue
- Visitor Services’ monthly surveys and comments

It also takes into account other strategic initiatives including the Building Development Framework 2014.

Feedback suggests there is a lot of trust and goodwill for the Museum at this time, and reassures that much that’s already in hand is right and appreciated. The report identifies where there’s scope to do more, while identifying where there are still gaps in knowledge and current action plans, and suggests ways these might be efficiently addressed.

The Museum already understands that there must be change, this report addresses how this can best be managed, and in the context of challenges to public safety and security.

To understand who is saying what about the Museum the report considers input from the widest possible visiting public, as well as from different internal departments and functions, from Members and regular visitors, and from various community groups. Comments and thoughts shared
across different groups are distinguished from those that appear to conflict. The Museum aims to enable visitors, regardless of their age, current knowledge, social and economic circumstance, to engage not only with objects but with ideas. Here there is a need for additional demographic data and feedback to be sought and reviewed routinely if the Museum’s effectiveness in meeting these aims is to be understood and a strategy for all visitors is to be developed.

i.1.7 The majority of the Museum’s feedback from all sources is positive. Some of the areas for improvement have already been identified by the Museum in order to enhance the visitor experience and it has begun to address them. Crowding at bottlenecks, the shortcomings in toilets and accessibility, and the variety and cost of available food, for example, are recurring irritations that can impact on the Museum’s reputation. Where continued or more urgent attention would be worthwhile this report recommends prioritising these things before tackling some of the emerging ideas that would benefit from further consideration and longer-term investment.

i.1.8 Ticketing, information points and retail outlets attract positive commentary, with shortcomings readily resolved through improved signage and alternative merchandise. There are clear opportunities for branding improvements as part of the Motf initiative, to demonstrate the Museum is listening to visitors’ comments and acting on their ideas.

i.1.9 The Museum is well aware of the bigger, recurring issues like overcrowding and navigation to and around the museum and past work such as the Building Development Framework (BDF) has begun to inform its thinking and is likely to be helpfully supplemented by work such as the review of gallery display space.

i.1.10 But locating and navigating the building now have to be considered in the context of heightened national security and the need to ensure visitor safety. Anticipating that any temporary facilities in the grounds to enable enhanced security, such as bag searches, will become more permanent features and could also offer fresh opportunities to further improve visitor engagement. This report takes these new challenges, such as safety and security, and combines and aligns them with comments made during the first phase of the Motf initiative.

i.1.11 Advances in digital technology emerge as a challenge and an opportunity in making the collection more accessible and improving in-Museum wayfinding and interpretation. Digital reform deserves to be at the heart of the Motf initiative. A review of the Museum’s online presence will help to maximise public benefit in the short term as feedback reveals the website can be frustrating for some.

i.1.12 Over the longer term, estimates of growing numbers of visitors to the UK from overseas mean the Museum will expect to see a marked increase in visitor volumes putting further pressure on every aspect of the building and its functions. More integrated internal working, a strategy for all the Museum’s visitors, and a more permeable and navigable building are all now crucial to sustainable success.

i.1.13 The Motf ethos must run through the very DNA of the Museum. More than just a good way to have dialogue with visitors and stakeholders, it is a different way of thinking about all aspects of strategic development. It has created an open and inclusive process of engagement that is both
popular and effective. Many staff and volunteers are already up for the challenge and keen to be part of the change. Visitors are supportive and can only benefit. The issues that need addressing to deliver a sustainable improvement programme fall into three key areas:

- Change – conceptual and real physical change
- Integration – physically in London; tours, loans and exhibitions outside the Museum’s London home; and digitally
- Experience – the quality of creature comforts; navigation; and intellectual stimulation and storytelling

i.1.14 Despite constraints and difficulties, there is much that the Museum does well. It remains a popular, respected and vitally important institution. Many things will be achieved because it has already started to plan, however other long-standing issues, or new concerns need attention now and should confidently be badged as part of the Motf programme.

i.2.0 Next steps:

i.2.1 Recommendations

The report makes recommendations and these are set out at section 5. Next Steps on page 23 and cross-referenced in the main body of the report.

i.2.2 Staff

- fully engage with all staff and volunteers at all levels of the organisation
- maintain an open and inclusive style of thinking and engagement
- utilise established management and personnel structures including trade union liaison
- staff and volunteers to take direct responsibility for Motf improvements

i.2.3 Feedback to stakeholders and Motf participants

- stakeholders and those who participated in the initial debates and engagement activities need to know what practical plans are emerging
- engage further with those already involved and expand and deepen the sphere of influence

i.2.4 Motf legacy

- establish an annual Motf lecture, debate, or similar flagship activity
- develop additional branded engagement activity with the Museum’s visitors, stakeholders and various communities
1.0 Introduction

1.1 There are many startling facts concerning The British Museum. Here are just five things to bear in mind while reading this report:

- The Museum is Britain’s number one visitor attraction now with almost seven million people visiting every year
- With 63% of all visitors coming for the first time, hundreds of millions of people have passed through the Museum’s doors over its 260 year life
- One in four of all visitors to London come to the Museum – one in ten of all those who visit the country
- Thanks to advances in the Museum’s loans and partnerships programmes, 3 million people saw British Museum objects in museums outside London, compared to the 2 million UK visitors that travelled to the site in Bloomsbury
- The more items that are made available digitally the more people seem to want to come and experience them for real

1.2 The Museum has been evolving ever since it first opened in Montagu House in 1753. More recently though it has taken some bold and successful steps to set itself apart – a museum of the world, for the world. Landmark developments such as the Great Court and the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre (WCEC) have made huge improvements in the Museum’s ability to conserve, display and understand the collection; to enhance the visitor’s experience; and to undertake groundbreaking special exhibitions, everything from the Terracotta Warriors to the Vikings, improvements that have marked the Museum out as a true world leader.

1.3 The Trustees and staff understand the importance and history of the Museum and its collection, but recognise it faces challenges that cannot be ignored. With increasing visitor numbers and higher experience expectations, The British Museum wants to consider how it responds to these pressures and its role and future within London, the UK and internationally.

1.4 The Museum understands the need for change and so the Museum of the future initiative was established in 2014 to enable the Museum to engage with its many and varied stakeholders on the big questions that the organisation faces.

1.5 The process has allowed individuals and organisations to share their ideas and thoughts and contribute to developing the future direction for The British Museum. This report aims to capture the responses and comments made during the first phase of the Museum of the future initiative and align them with new challenges such as safety and security.

1.6 This is not the end of the process but rather the beginning of an ongoing dialogue that will allow The British Museum’s stakeholders to contribute further.

1.7 Put simply, the Museum of the future should offer every visitor the best possible experience to interact with the collection, on every occasion and in every way.
2.0 Background

2.1 The Museum commissioned The Green Brain to produce a report that captured the feedback from the first phase of the Museum of the future’s public engagement events and community engagement programme. The report was to include:

- A reminder of why the Museum undertook the Museum of the future (Motf) initiative and the thinking that has led up to it over recent years

- How the Motf begins to link with other recent major Museum initiatives, including:
  - Building Development Framework 2014
  - Completion and occupation of the WCEC building

- How the emerging learning from the start of the Motf programme can help address:
  - The ever increasing demand for space and access
  - The enormous potential of the digital revolution
  - The new ideas and opportunities that the Motf debate has started

- Summary of feedback received from the variety of sources and the conclusions to be drawn

2.2 The Museum has been very busy in recent years. Its Director and Trustees have steered it through a series of ever more spectacular and ground-breaking special exhibitions; dramatic increases in visitor numbers; and the design, financing, building and completion of the WCEC. The Motf initiative builds on these recent achievements enabling greater stakeholder engagement to help guide the Museum to a long and sustainable future.

2.3 This initial report is produced to facilitate the next wave of key decisions. It gives a narrative to the direction the Museum is now moving in and the emerging lessons and understanding that have come from the first steps of the Motf.

3.0 Report structure and input sources

3.0.1 The report covers the Museum of the future’s genesis; its first phase of debate and consultation; the feedback received; how those views fit with other recent initiatives from the Museum; and concludes by making recommendations for next steps.

3.0.2 We have sought to give a consistent approach to all source material and input data in order to, as far as possible, compare like with like; combine data where appropriate and point out when different things are giving different results and/or leading to different conclusions.

3.0.3 The solicited data in this report has been collated by The Green Brain from any additional written comments provided in response to the Motf questionnaire. The majority of the 1,427 questionnaires contained some additional written comments. Each comment was read and summarised into one word, in order to create the pie charts in section 4 of this report. This has resulted in often small sample sizes which provide only an indication of some visitor views.
3.0.4 In addition to three major headline debates, there have been numerous community events organised by the Learning, Volunteers and Audiences (LVA) department. Thanks to imaginative marketing, digital and media activity, the Motf programme has been a great success and has gathered a lot of helpful feedback and comments from a wide variety of sources. This includes data from those who attended live events; general visitors surveyed in the Museum; and from those who have followed the programme online and on social media around the country and around the world.

3.0.5 Thousands of people have participated in numerous events and over 1,400 people have contributed their thoughts, stimulated by the quality of the debate and the imagination of their own ideas and those of their fellow participants.

3.0.6 Together with its ongoing surveys; recent initiatives; and its current thinking the Motf puts the Museum in a very interesting position to know more about the work that it wants to do, the work that it needs to do and the views of its many stakeholders and audiences on its potential. In creating the Motf initiative, the Museum has the foundations for a very inclusive and popular method for positive and broad engagement with its communities, its visitors and its staff.

3.0.7 The Museum is currently highly regarded with a very wide range of stakeholders. The general and specific feedback around the Motf initiative has been largely positive and offers a great opportunity to take stock of the current position and prepare for the lasting decisions that will need to be taken over the course of the next few years.

3.1.0 Data sources

3.1.1 The data in this report has been gathered from a variety of sources, both in-house at The British Museum and externally by the research company Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (MHM). Some further analysis of the data has been undertaken by The Green Brain for the purposes of this report.

3.1.2 The table below shows the data used and its sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report/Source</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Received</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consultation on a mass scale</td>
<td>Morris Hargreaves McIntyre</td>
<td>06/03/15</td>
<td>Solicited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Development framework</td>
<td>The British Museum</td>
<td>13/02/15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments and Feedback Reports Jan-June ‘14</td>
<td>The British Museum</td>
<td>17/03/15</td>
<td>Unsolicited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments and Feedback Reports Sept-Dec’14 Jan’15</td>
<td>The British Museum</td>
<td>13/02/15</td>
<td>Unsolicited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BM Research Findings Q1-Q3 ’14-15</td>
<td>Morris Hargreaves McIntyre</td>
<td>17/03/15</td>
<td>Solicited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript of Motf 1st debate</td>
<td>The British Museum</td>
<td>13/02/15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript of Motf 2nd debate</td>
<td>The British Museum</td>
<td>13/02/15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcript of Motf 3rd debate</td>
<td>The British Museum</td>
<td>13/02/15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motf Verbatim responses spreadsheet</td>
<td>The British Museum</td>
<td>17/03/15</td>
<td>Solicited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motf Verbatim responses spreadsheet Review</td>
<td>The Green Brain</td>
<td>Completed 24/03/15</td>
<td>Solicited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Motf You Tube Videos</td>
<td>The British Museum</td>
<td>06/03/15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The British Museum Motf workshop</td>
<td>The Green Brain</td>
<td>20/03/15</td>
<td>Solicited</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.1.3 The data can be categorised as solicited or unsolicited. Solicited data was mainly in the form of responses from questionnaires written by The British Museum, which invited the respondent to both tick boxes and add written comments, or in workshops organised by The Green Brain, the unsolicited data came from members of the public who felt compelled to comment following their visit, by filling in a customer feedback form or by posting their views on Trip Advisor, and from a sample of the online and social media dialogue taking place around the Motf debates. Participants in, and observers of, the Motf debates were encouraged to use the hashtag #MuseumoftheFuture in order to post questions and comments both during the live debates and throughout the engagement process. Those comments on Twitter and other social media have not been collated into a separate document as they remain available online.

3.2.0 The written output

3.2.1 This report brings together information, activity and thinking from widely varying sources and disseminates the evidence to all stakeholder groups. The Museum hopes that everyone will find the content interesting and challenging.

3.2.2 This report can be used as a springboard to progress the Motf initiative along with the future investment plan and other major activities including a review of the Building Development Framework (BDF).

3.2.3 This report draws together analysis of those data under a Motf umbrella to give examples of the findings; however it does not replicate the data or exhaust all the possibilities for the Museum's future decision-making process.

3.2.4 A number of important principles were established in putting the Motf initiative together and these are reflected as far as possible in the way data has been analysed and in the report's construction. The Museum wanted to hear all voices and will continue to listen. The report has been compiled over a three month period by an inclusive process involving internal stakeholders and staff.

3.2.5 The data from all sources shows there is a lot of trust and goodwill for the Museum at this time. The Museum intends to build on this strong foundation that the first phase of the Motf initiative has provided.
4.0 Combining the lessons learned

4.0.1 This section concentrates on the results of the Motf feedback, combines it with other data and considers the implications for the Museum. We have taken both a horizontal look across the Museum and sought involvement from different departments and functions, as well as data from regular surveys and different initiatives over recent years. We have also sliced the data vertically to look at who is saying what: from those closely involved with the Museum, its Members, academics and regular visitors; to various community groups; and also from the many different visitors who come every day.

4.0.2 Where possible we have combined the lessons learned from both the horizontal and vertical slicing to point out commonality of thought and comment and, occasionally, pointing out where different groups and sources are saying different things on similar subjects – and suggesting why.

4.0.3 There are many areas where the feedback will be familiar – the Museum knows only too well how overcrowded the building can get and that the inadequate toilets are a disproportionate source of irritation to many visitors. However, the report will repeat known information because the Motf has produced the same data once again. It may be appropriate that these issues are marked for the earliest action while other, newer ideas and concepts are given further consideration.

4.0.4 Some of the issues have practical implications – it may not be possible to improve the toilets or move the cloakroom before the long-term future of the Reading Room is known, but it is important to question the thinking behind such decisions given the Motf feedback. Other things may raise deeper philosophical questions – if someone complains about the cafés is that simply a request for more diversity of sandwich fillings or do they point to more serious questions of cultural understanding and the needs of the millions of different visitors from all around the world?

4.1.0 The people engaged

4.1.1 The reach of the data and number of people engaged in each source can be seen on a pyramid, with reports which engage with a smaller number at the top through to the masses at the base.
4.1.2 Customer feedback forms are compiled monthly but there is no similar document looking at the comments from the Trip Advisor website or online social media feeds. Together these represent the largest sources of unsolicited feedback from the general public and are perhaps being overlooked (see recommendations).

4.1.3 It is important to know that Trip Advisor comments are overwhelmingly positive, but as with all large tourist attractions there is room for improvement. The Museum is not alone in getting these “could do better” type of comments and a comparison is available at Appendix b.

4.2.0 Comparing the data

4.2.1 We have taken all the available data to see if there are common points of similarity or difference, to try and identify the major areas of concern and interest. Where possible The Green Brain has also completed further analysis of the written comments data, listed below as the ‘verbatim response spreadsheet’, this data has been used in conjunction with the other sources in the table below to make the conclusions and recommendations in this report.

4.2.2 Key areas of interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key areas of interest</th>
<th>Consultation on a Mass Scale (MHM)</th>
<th>Verbatim Response Spreadsheet</th>
<th>MotF Debate 1</th>
<th>MotF Debate 2</th>
<th>MotF Debate 3</th>
<th>BM Comments and Feedback Report</th>
<th>Trip Advisor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visitor facilities Cafe and Food</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitor Navigation around museum</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitor facilities cloakroom and toilets</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowd control/Overcrowding</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seating</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining access to more of the collection</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of digital technology in the Museum</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding the Museum</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced Mobility Access</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digitising the collection</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial and environmental sustainability</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactive areas for the under 5’s</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Above: Key areas of interest table. Information ranked by the number of times it is mentioned in different reports, not by any other statistical weighting.

For clarity, Café and Food tops the chart above because it is mentioned most often across the range of reports and sources listed. It did not however receive the greatest number of mentions in the MotF feedback questionnaire.

4.2.3 Many sources remind us that a frequent visitor desire, as well as a Museum aspiration, is that The British Museum should be a building where people can not only view and interact with the objects in the collection but where they can engage with ideas and knowledge, exploring and learning from the history of human understanding. Visitors should be inspired by the collection and it should appeal to a diverse range of visitors.
4.2.4 MHM reports on the visitor demographics and the age ranges of those using the Museum in the Annual Report. However, these data on visitor age range would be considerably improved if information about the large numbers of group and school visits were added to the data set. Casual observation on any given day suggests that a substantial proportion of those visiting the Museum are children and young students. A better understanding of the true demographics of the visitors would improve the data, and the accuracy of conclusions made using it. The museum already collects data from educational visits usually made by local parties, from a range of schools and young person institutions taking part in the learning programme. However, more can and should be done to collect information and feedback from the wider range of groups such as external tour guides and those school groups not participating in the learning programme, with a wider demographic and sphere of influence (see recommendations).

4.3.0 Things to be getting on with

4.3.1 Many of these are things that the Museum has already identified as issues. They have been reported over several years and are the subject of regular feedback. They feature in the Building Development Framework and capital works budget and once again the Motf data backs up how these things affect the visitor experience.

4.3.2 The Museum strives to deliver a positive and easy visitor experience. It was described in the first Motf debate as, “an ecosystem that includes the objects, the physical building and the people; everyone and everything playing its part to create something brilliant.”

4.3.3 While the majority of the Museum’s feedback is positive, and it is the UK’s most popular visitor attraction, some of the areas for improvement that have been identified by the Museum, are backed up again here by the Motf data and are therefore worth addressing as they are regularly identified as things that mar the visitor’s experience.

4.3.4 It might be worth bringing potential improvements and planned maintenance under the Motf banner and thinking through any delays in taking action. Is it because the thing in question is:

- Impossible to resolve?
- Impossible to do right now?
- Impossible to do without understanding the bigger picture?

4.4.0 Improving the visitor experience

4.4.1 Toilets

4.4.1.1 The MHM report Consultation on a Mass Scale, reports an ambivalent response to the Museum’s facilities, with the toilets and cloakroom fairing worst. From the available written comments in the questionnaires the pie chart below shows the reasons why the current facilities often do not meet the needs of respondents.
4.4.1.2 Long queues, poor cleanliness and maintenance are top of the list of comments. This is also something that the Museum has on its list and will want to remedy quickly to improve the visitor experience (see recommendations).

4.4.1.3 Comments were also received about the accessibility of the toilets for those with restricted or reduced mobility (RRM). The facilities’ poor signage and distance from lifts were cited as the main issues and having to search for the specialist toilets on a different floor away from the main exhibitions makes it more difficult for some people. The Museum consults regularly with local access groups and these are issues worth raising again in those forums.

4.4.2 Cafés

4.4.2.1 The restaurant and café feedback suggests that customers find it overcrowded and pricy, without enough choice for those with food intolerances, special dietary requirements or cultural preferences – given the Museum’s international appeal this is something that should be given further thought (see recommendations). There were also comments that the cafés are impersonal and not in keeping with the Museum ambiance or style (see recommendations). Whilst the cafés serve an audience the feedback notably included anecdotal comments saying the food outlets are not frequented by a proportion of the respondents in favour of using the Tesco round the corner to buy a picnic to eat in the grounds of the Museum, or on the steps in the Great Court, possibly impeding other visitors and, of course, denying the Museum income.
4.4.3 Retail

4.4.3.1 The retail outlets within The British Museum received many positive comments and people welcomed the ability to buy a souvenir of their trip. There were some comments from more regular visitors relating to a change in the type of stock available and a feeling that perhaps the lower priced “tourist” items were becoming more prevalent. There were a number of comments from people who would welcome a larger array of postcards in the shop, in order to take home a professional image of their favourite museum piece (see recommendations).
4.4.4 Information points

4.4.4.1 The vast majority of people completing the feedback questionnaire tick to say the ticketing and information points within the museum meet their needs. 96 people left written comments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clearer Signage</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't use</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowded</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More detail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Book online</td>
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<td>Digital Floor Plan</td>
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<td>Booking Process</td>
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<td>Poor ticketing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sample composed only of those who gave a specific answer in the Motf e-survey to the chart’s entitled question

4.4.4.2 Feedback from those who commented suggested that the ticketing and information points require clearer signage, to highlight their existence and what might be available in terms of physical and audio guides and programmes of engagement for younger visitors (see recommendations).

4.4.4.3 A substantial number of the Motf event audience completing the questionnaire were Museum Members and regular visitors. They tended to know their way around, as can be seen by the number of people who chose to add written comment on this question and the proportion of those comments that suggested the respondents didn’t use the information points. It is unsurprising that this group do not require help from information point staff. This is one of those issues where there is a marked difference between the views and needs of many of the audience attending Motf events and the far greater numbers of other Museum visitors who clearly do make use of the information points.

4.4.5 Branding improvements

4.4.5.1 There is a strong case for the Museum accelerating these frequently-mentioned projects. It is clear that whenever the Museum asks any audience or visitor group for feedback these same issues are raised. The Museum has expressed its desire to address these points over several years and through several studies. There will be major benefits from improving the visitor experience and removing such sources of irritation.

4.4.5.2 Staff also mentioned the opportunities for branding improvements and initiatives as part of the Motf programme. This would help bring improvements and maintenance together under an identifiable banner and demonstrate that the museum is listening to visitors’ comments and acting on their ideas. Staff felt that both Transport for London and The Victoria & Albert Museum are good examples of where this sort of branding is currently being done well. All over the London
Underground TfL is seemingly inconveniencing passengers with station refurbishments and alterations, but the maintenance work is always well communicated in advance and when, for example, escalators are out of commission the hoardings around the work clearly explain what is being done, why, how long the disruption will last and what the benefits will be when the work is completed. The V&A has also recently taken to following this model of open communication and branding improvement work (see recommendations).

4.5.0 Tackling the bigger issues

4.5.1 Overcrowding and permeability

4.5.1.1 The issues of overcrowding and navigation to and around the museum are repeatedly mentioned in many different sources. The Museum is well aware of these bigger issues and has been considering the need to tackle them for some years. The review of the BDF that grew out of it looked at the issues of overcrowding and visitor flow and this is again being addressed as gallery space and display issues are considered (see recommendations).

4.5.1.2 Greater permeability of the Museum (both the site and the building), along with issues of overcrowding and way-finding, were raised several times during the first Motf debate and the issues of navigation and ‘comfort’ in the building are frequently highlighted by many visitors, in both the solicited and unsolicited data, as being detrimental to the enjoyment of their visit and their engagement with the collection. The sense of ‘barriers’ to visiting was raised with the symbolism of the railings discussed as a physical manifestation of more psychological barriers. Many community partners praised the work the Museum has undertaken to increase access to the collection and buildings and to break down such ‘barriers’. The Motf initiative has helped highlight the importance of this work and its activities (see recommendations).

4.5.1.3 These issues of finding one’s way to and through the building are now given an extra dimension as we live in a time of heightened national security and the need to ensure visitor safety is added to all the other creature comforts expected of a major tourist attraction.

4.5.1.4 Temporary arrangements to facilitate bag searches and security checks are being tested in the front grounds of the Museum. These facilities are likely to appear more often in the future and may need to become a permanent feature if the threat of international terrorism remains severe and the national security status remains high for the foreseeable future. On one hand this is an additional burden for the Museum to resource and a potential hold up for visitors, on the other hand it may present an opportunity for early visitor engagement (see recommendations).

4.5.1.5 If security facilities need to become more permanent structures there may also be additional opportunity to help manage visitor flows; provide information and a welcome to visitors; and create alternative and additional opportunities for refreshment and retail therapy.
A typical “disappointed” review from Trip Advisor relating to the overcrowding in popular areas of the museum

4.5.1.6 There are many positive things said about the Museum in online reviews, however the example above from Trip Advisor is typical of the ‘overcrowded’ comments that the Museum regularly attracts. The British Museum is not alone in suffering this problem, or this sort of feedback, and examples of comparable comments on Trip Advisor about other London museums can be found in Appendix b. Whereas this may be a common problem across London’s museums and other major tourist attractions, it doesn’t mean that The British Museum shouldn’t be looking for innovative ways to ease the problem even if it cannot completely alleviate it at its site (see recommendations).

4.5.1.7 The data identifies that bottlenecks in popular areas and problems that can be caused by the growing number of visitors in moving around the Museum is a real challenge in making the visitor experience a positive one.

Sample composed only of those who gave a specific answer in the Motf e-survey to the chart’s entitled question
4.5.2 Suggestions for addressing overcrowding

4.5.2.1 During the first Motf debate audience members were invited to suggest ways in which overcrowding might be addressed. Suggestions included: the use of staff to make suggestions to visitors of other displays in the Museum and direct people to less busy areas, as is common practice on cruise ships for example; extending the Museum’s opening hours – “if the shops in the area are open until at 8.30pm, why does the Museum close at 5.30pm?” was one comment; or the idea of directing school parties and tour guides to alternative entrances and providing suggestions for less congested routes around the Museum.

4.5.2.2 Understanding when large organised groups of people would like to visit the collection (beyond the current education programme) becomes more important and the idea of an e-ticket system was proposed at the first Motf debate and also at a staff workshop. This suggestion could encourage groups to ‘book’ their visit via the website, giving the Museum advanced warning of numbers attending and the option/ability to encourage those groups to spread out their visits over time and better direct them to what they want to see to help ease traffic and visitor flows. Similarly, if survey data was routinely collected from these groups then it would be easier to predict who might be coming when and what they might be hoping to see (see recommendations).

4.5.2.3 The use of digital technology was also suggested as an important tool to help people navigate the Museum and better find the things they want to see. There is clearly a role here for the ‘Navigation App’ suggested in the second Motf debate.

4.5.2.4 Congestion caused by the poor flow of people around the museum and the way the collection is arranged to tell the story of humankind also featured in the Motf feedback. As one respondent put it “The age of wonderment has passed, it is no longer sufficient to just see and be amazed by the items on display.” Over the last 40 years popular historical and anthropological television shows have brought our story to a mass audience. The extraordinary popularity of The History of the World in 100 Objects was often cited as evidence that the general public’s capacity and enthusiasm for knowledge has grown and changed. Understanding how the collection fits in the history of the whole world has become more important. For example, “If Egypt was doing this, at this time, what was happening in China or Britain at the same time?” People want the galleries and displays to tell them a story not simply be arranged for the benefit of academics, who might already know what it is they are looking at.

4.5.3 Understanding how the Museum is arranged

4.5.3.1 When asked if the museum was easy to navigate, one of the most recurring issues was that people found the museum confusing (over one third of respondents), due to its layout and inadequate signage, or they mentioned the need for better physical and digital maps.
4.5.3.2 The British Museum website can be an important tool for providing easier navigation around the Museum, as well as an important resource for accessing vast amounts of data about the collections. Currently use seems divided between those that use it for academic research purposes and those that simply want to find out the opening times of the building or book tickets for special exhibitions. Either way, feedback about the website reveals that it can be a deeply frustrating experience at times, or limited in value to some users.

4.5.3.3 Suggestions such as interactive maps or specialised tours of specific and related items, that can be downloaded from the website in advance of a visit, or accessed via a smartphone App, could help the issue of finding the building in the first place and then alleviate the problem of navigating around it during visits.

4.5.3.4 WiFi is now generally available for visitors throughout the Museum and this will help facilitate the digital revolution, the importance of which was the subject of the second Motf debate. These issues are clearly of interest to visitors and will only become more important.

4.5.3.5 Greater integration of all the existing digital tools available to the Museum via its website and other online presence, for example live feeds from social media sites on the website or links to the YouTube channel, could be achieved quite quickly. The data tells us that placing digital reform at the heart of the Museum of the future programme should be the Museum’s aim to meet the growing demand and expectations of its visitors (see recommendations).

4.5.3.6 The British Museum has already started looking into combining the need for digital integration and interactive displays as it considers a review of gallery space and displays. The feedback and available data suggests that the idea of changing displays and the ability to access more of the Museum’s collection is positively welcomed – provided that key artefacts are not removed from permanent display. The timescale of rotation was addressed in the feedback, and most comments suggest that items should remain on show for a minimum of 12 months before being rotated.
4.5.3.7 With WiFi now introduced throughout the Museum and a better understanding of visitor flow, rethinking gallery and space organisation are projects being planned for the near future. By using the Motf umbrella to brand all of these projects along the lines of the TfL and V&A examples mentioned earlier, it might be possible to achieve a greater sense of integration across the Museum and improve the perception of project management in the eyes of visitors and staff alike.

4.5.3.8 Feedback suggests the Motf approach could be used to help meet visitor expectations and deliver the best possible experience for all visitors, on all occasions, in all formats – and even when it doesn’t (or can’t) at least that might be better explained so that people understand why and are maybe a little more forgiving.

4.6.0 Over the longer term

4.6.1 As the Director points out in his introduction to the Building Development Framework, Visit Britain has set a goal to increase the number of visitors to our country from the current annual 31 million to 40 million by 2020. As one of Britain’s most popular visitor destinations, the Museum will expect to see a marked increase in visitor numbers as a result – putting yet further pressure on every aspect of the building and the subjects of this report. Add to that the Museum’s own momentum for growth and its ability to attract ever increasing visitor numbers and it is possible to see how these will continue to escalate into the future.

4.6.2 Managing that increase and supporting the essential purpose of the Museum becomes ever more challenging given the physical constraints of the site. Continuing support and co-operation between departments, developing a strategy for all the Museum’s visitors, and achieving a far more permeable and more easily navigable building are now more important than ever (see recommendations).

4.6.3 Understanding the impact and consequences of different existing strategies and planning accordingly will be key to the successful implementation of change. One example of which came at the Motf staff workshop when it was highlighted that there are still many millions more objects in the collection to be digitised and that well documented library evidence shows that each time more
of a collection is made available online, visitor numbers appear to increase as people want to see the objects for real. Maybe not making a special visit, but greater awareness means that there is increasingly more things on the ‘must see’ list.

4.6.4 Whilst the digitisation of the Museum’s collection is an ongoing strategy for the purposes of cataloguing and conservation, managing the timings for the release of digitised material would be wise. For example; it would help if new digital content made available online didn’t coincide with the physical gallery being reorganised or public access being limited for a time.

4.6.5 Given its prominence in the Great Court, it is maybe surprising that the old Reading Room was not more often mentioned in the debates or raised in the large number of comments received. The fact is it wasn’t. Nonetheless it remains a very important space to the Museum and its future is being very carefully considered. Since the successful opening of the WCEC a year ago the old Reading Room’s temporary use as a special exhibitions space has ceased and all the temporary structures are being removed. As the Motf programme continues and the gallery spaces and displays are reviewed, so a future for the old Reading Room will be woven into that thinking and specifically consulted on before any final decisions are made.

4.7.0 Conclusions

4.7.1 The Museum has created an open and inclusive process of engagement which has proved both popular and effective. The Motf ethos should now run through the very DNA of the Museum. The programme is more than just a good way to have a dialogue with visitors and stakeholders; it is a different way of thinking about engagement, involvement, communication and development with everyone.

4.7.2 There should also be more meaningful and ongoing engagement with staff and volunteers at all levels, and there is evidence that many are already up for the challenge, seeing the Motf as a good idea and a worthwhile process for change.

4.7.3 In many ways the Motf feedback, together with data from other surveys and sources, boils down to three things:

- Change – conceptual and real physical change
- Integration – physically in London; tours, loans and exhibitions outside the Museum’s London home; and digitally
- Experience – the quality of creature comforts; navigation; and intellectual stimulation and storytelling

4.7.4 And, as mentioned in section 5a, three questions can be asked of those three things:

- Is it possible to do the thing in question at all? Are there any physical or practical constraints?
- Is it possible to do it now? Or, if not now, when might it become possible?
- Is it impossible to undertake the thing now because of a lack of information about the bigger picture?
4.7.5 This report covers a number of things that the Museum is already considering to improve the visitor experience. The Motf provides the Museum with an ideal opportunity to badge those things and make progress now.

4.7.6 Many of the bigger issues and mid-term goals will require careful planning and liaising with organised international parties and external tours (beyond the education programme) so that visitors in large organised groups can be managed more effectively. The feedback identifies bigger mid-term goals like making far greater use of technology and considering how the gallery spaces and displays are arranged to help people better plan their visits and navigate the building more easily. These projects could also be branded as part of Motf as they will all add to an improved and sustainable future for the Museum as well as enhancing the visitor experience.

4.7.7 Over the longer term the ongoing project of digitising the collection will continue along with developing a visitor strategy for all the Museum’s visitors. The Motf initiative, together with regularly collected and unsolicited data, backs up this approach.

4.7.8 There is one word of caution in this conclusion – the Museum has a lot of data on the views and opinions from those at the top of the pyramid; its ‘insiders’, members and regular visitors; it knows a lot less about the vast majority of its visitors and fails to engage with this very substantial group on anything like the same level. The Museum recognises that this is something that it should address and that the strategy for digital engagement can help support this initiative.

4.7.9 There is much that the Museum does well and is rightly credited for, and despite its constraints and difficulties it remains a very popular, respected and vitally important institution. Many of the things it needs to do will be achieved because it has already started to plan for them and it must not fall into the trap of believing that nothing can be done until everything is done.
5.0 Next Steps

5.1. Recommendations to help improve the visitor experience

- Regularly review Trip Advisor and social media to supplement the current monthly feedback report to maintain a broader, up-to-date picture of public perceptions of the Museum

- Routinely collect additional visitor socio-demographic data, such as age profiles of groups and school parties, to help measure and improve the Museum’s effectiveness in meeting its inclusiveness and accessibility aims, and to aid strategic planning

- Routinely collect feedback from informal groups and externally guided tours, in addition to the schools and education programme groups already surveyed, to better understand their requirements and how far their expectations are being met

- Prioritise improvements to toilet facilities and their ongoing maintenance

- Review variety and cost of available food and drink in the restaurant and café, to include those with special dietary, religious or cultural needs and better reflect the Museum’s international appeal

- Review restaurant and café environments to identify how to integrate them more with the Museum’s style and atmosphere

- Ensure the range and variety of stock in the Museum shop is an appropriate blend of visitor souvenirs, themed gifts and informative media

- Review signage for ticketing and information points, to improve way-finding and raise awareness of the resources available to enhance a visit

- Brand improvements and developments as part of the Museum of the future programme.

- Explore how currently temporary security facilities might help provide more permanent opportunities to manage visitor flows, improve information provision, and introduce new retail and refreshment outlets

- Review ideas and insight from all sources on overcrowding and congestion, along with policies, processes, communications, and physical structures and layout, to help address the issue in the short and longer terms

- Place digital reform at the heart of the Museum of the future programme and undertake a user-centric review of the Museum’s website and other digital channels and assets, to improve the experience for users and stakeholders while away from the Museum, as well as visitors during their time at the Museum

- Develop a strategy for all the Museum’s visitors

- Deliver a more permeable and more easily navigable building

- Where urgent attention is worthwhile, prioritise those issues before tackling some of the emerging ideas that would benefit from further consideration and longer-term investment.
• Feedback what the Museum is doing with Motf to all its stakeholders and with its external public audiences

5.2. Staff

• Fully engage with all staff and volunteers at all levels of the organisation
• Involve all staff and volunteers as part of the Motf’s development
• Enable staff and volunteers to take direct responsibility for Motf improvements

5.3 Feedback to stakeholders and Motf participants

• Keep stakeholders and those who participated in the initial debates and engagement activities informed about what practical plans are emerging
• Engage further with those already involved and expand and deepen the sphere of influence

5.4 Motf legacy

• Establish an annual Motf lecture, debate, or similar flagship activity
• Develop additional branded engagement activity with the Museum’s visitors, stakeholders and various communities
Appendices

a. Data sets and sources

b. Other references and links
Appendix a.

Data sets and sources


Museum of the future 1st Debate Audio Full. (Transcript of the audio)

Museum of the future 2nd Debate Audio Full. (Transcript of the audio)

Museum of the future 3rd Debate Audio Full. (Transcript of the audio)

Visitor Services Comments and Feedback Reports Oct ’14 – Dec ’15. Compiled by Dominic Gibbons

Visitor Services Comments and Feedback Reports Jan-May ’14. Compiled by Peter McGrane

Consultation on a Mass Scale. Jan 2015. Morris Hargreaves McIntyre (MHM)


Museum of the future Feedback. Verbatim Responses Spreadsheet, compiled for Joe Edwards by MHM. The Motf ‘e-survey which was advertised at events (and where attenders’ details were gathered to invite them to take part) and through the Museum of the future’s microsite and other online activity (e.g. the Tumblr blog and via Twitter). The survey received a total of 1,427 responses: 71 from audience members across the three debates and 1,356 from visitors to the microsite. Survey responses were gathered from 11 September through to 4 January’.

Review of Verbatim Responses Spreadsheet (the individual comments collected by the written and online Motf questionnaire). Gemma Bull, The Green Brain.

Twitter #MuseumoftheFuture
Appendix b.

Other references and links

http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g186338-d187555-Reviews-or40-British_Museum-London_England.html#REVIEWS

http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g186338-d187676-Reviews-Natural_History_Museum-London_England.html

http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g186338-d187556-Reviews-Victoria_and_Albert_Museum-London_England.html

https://www.youtube.com/user/britishmuseum/videos

http://www.britishmuseum.org/

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