
Minutes

The British Museum Board Meeting 27 November 2023

Held at the British Museum and via MS Teams

Present

Mr George Osborne Chair
Professor Abhijit Banerjee
Professor Dame Mary Beard
Dame Elizabeth Corley
Professor Chris Gosden
Ms Muriel Gray (item 1)
Mr Philipp Hildebrand
Dame Vivian Hunt
Sir Charlie Mayfield
Mr Mark Pears
Sir Paul Ruddock
Mr Alejandro Santo Domingo
Mr Weijian Shan
Ms Priyanka Wadhawan
Professor Sir Mark Walport
Mr George Weston
Professor Dame Sarah Worthington

In Attendance

Sir Mark Jones Director
Christopher Yates Deputy Director
(items 1-4)
Carl Heron Acting Deputy Director
(items 1-4)
Kary Kelly Director of Advancement
(items 1-4)
Jill Maggs Director of Public
Engagement (items 1-4)
Russell Torrance Director of
Estates and Capital Projects (items
1-4)
Lizzie Loudon Head of
Communications
David Bilson Head of Security and
Visitor Services (items 1-4)
Eoin Martin Governance Manager

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies had been received from Baroness Shafik, Clarissa Farr and Lord Marland.
- 1.2 The Chair turned to Muriel Gray, who informed the Trustees that she had made a personal decision to submit her resignation as a Trustee to the government. Muriel added that she would continue to support the Museum and wished her colleagues on the board all the best. The Chair thanked Muriel for her enormous contribution to the Museum over the previous seven years. Muriel then left the meeting.

2. Declaration of Interests

- 2.1 No interests were declared.

3. Corporate Sponsorship

- 3.1 The Chair opened the discussion by reminding the Trustees that, when they accepted the corporate sponsorship under discussion, the security of the collection was one fundamental consideration not only in reaching the decision but also in the timing and handling of any announcement. The Chair turned to Kary Kelly to update on engagement with the sponsor.
- 3.2 The Chair turned to Lizzie Loudon to summarise a paper that had been circulated, which set out plans for an announcement on the next phase of the Museum's Masterplan, which would be supported by the corporate sponsorship under discussion.
- 3.3 The Chair turned to David Bilson to summarise a paper that had been circulated, which set out measures already taken and measures planned for imminent implementation to enhance the security of the collection. This was in light of increased risks to museums as a result of protest activity. David set out how the steps in the paper would help to protect against any attempts to damage objects and improve the Museum's readiness to respond. David also cautioned, however, that the risk of an attempt to damage the collection might be heightened following the announcement of the corporate sponsorship under discussion and could not be fully avoided without inhibiting public access to the collection.

4. Next steps on corporate sponsorship

- 4.1 The Chair turned to the Director, who provided an overview of his preferred approach to an announcement and the security implications, in light of heightened risks to museum collections.

There was a discussion of the nature of risks to collections from environmental protestors and further measures that could be considered to stress test the Museum's ability to deter against attempts to damage objects and to respond to any attempts. The Trustees made clear to the Museum's Executive that while accepting the risks inherent in keeping the Museum open, the security of the Museum's collection was an important consideration in the timing and handling of any announcement.

It was discussed and agreed that independent confidential advice would be sought on additional risks to the security of the collection that may follow the announcement of sponsorship and, in particular, how any such risks might be most effectively mitigated. It was further agreed that a confidential note would be circulated to Trustees setting out additional security measures put in place.

There was also a discussion of the potential impact of a high-profile announcement on the personal safety of staff and Trustees, and the impact an announcement might have on the Museum's staff, both in respect of activity in the Museum and online. It was agreed that it would be important to set out for staff, the Museum's vision for the next phase of the Masterplan, which was necessary to protect the Museum's staff, visitors and its collection, and how this would be supported by corporate sponsorship.

[Note: It was subsequently confirmed that the Executive had informed and discussed with DCMS, as the Board's principal regulator, the intended announcement and accompanying plans]

5. Closed session

- 5.1 The management, other than Mark Jones, Lizzie Loudon and Eoin Martin, withdrew and the Trustees held a discussion.

_____Chair

Date of next meeting: 7 December 2023