

THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

AT A MEETING ON

MONDAY 26 APRIL, 2004

AT 9.00 A.M.

AT THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

Present

TRUSTEES

Professor Sir Keith O'Nions FRS (in the Chair)

Professor Dianne Edwards CBE FRS

Professor Christopher Leaver CBE FRS

Professor Jacquie McGlade

Dame Judith Mayhew Jonas

Lord Palumbo

Mr Oliver Stocken

Sir Richard Sykes FRS

Sir Neil Chalmers

Ms Milly Rosier (Secretary to the Board)

Ms Anna Cuss (minutes)

Ms Sharon Ament, Mr Neil Greenwood, Mr David Hill and Dr Richard Lane and Ms Whitaker were in attendance.

Closed session

776 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Sir William Castell, Professor Michael Hassell, Professor Georgina Mace and Professor Linda Partridge.

777 REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN

Trustees met in closed session to hear about developments since the Trustees' special meeting on 23 March 2004, including the meeting between staff and Trustees on 21 April 2004 and how things would be taken forward.

Open session

778 DARWIN CENTRE PHASE TWO (TP 04/09)

[This section to be made available in December 2009]

The Director then outlined the paper for Trustees. Of the five options for going ahead, which included fallback positions, the management were recommending Option 1, ie to continue with the current project, designed by CF Moller. In order to do this, it was essential to proceed to Stage E, which would provide a fully coordinated design with all main elements identified and designed. The Director stressed that to abandon the project before Stage E was achieved could cause significant reputational and increased financial risk to the Museum. He stressed that Phase Two of the Darwin Centre was not an add-on, but a necessity for the Museum's work on botany and entomology to function both safely and effectively, as well as providing the public access which was such a unique and successful component of Phase One. Without Darwin Centre Phase Two, there would still have to be a refurbishment programme for botany and entomology which would incur its own, not insignificant, cost.

The key message of paper TP 04/09 was that the £65 million required to proceed with Option 1 was achievable. It was clear that the right time for a final decision was September 2004. There would be increased clarity at this point, namely the completion of Stage E and a more realistic view of the funding position, which would need to be communicated to the Wellcome Trust in September in any case. Trustees would be in a better position at that point to make decisions on whether the Museum should contribute to any or part of any shortfall on the £65 million, or to move to the less expensive fallback option 4 outlined in the paper. This satisfied several of the objectives of the Darwin Centre and would lessen the likelihood of pledged money having to be returned.

Trustees raised a number of points in discussion:

There was concern about spending money on reaching Stage E if the project were then withdrawn at a later date. Mr Greenwood was able to confirm that of the £1.3 million required for Stage E, £1.25 million would be funded by hypothecated grant in aid from DCMS, which they had stated need not be returned if, after an assessment of the risks, there was a reasonable expectation that the project would proceed.

Trustees also asked for clarification on the Museum's financial position with regard to those donors who had already made pledges towards the project and whether there were any way of holding back on fundraising efforts until the position was clearer. As Chairman of the Development Council, Lord Palumbo urged Trustees to give their full support to proceeding with Option 1 and fundraising vigorously. He agreed with the Director's view that to hesitate now would be extremely damaging for the viability of the project, and added that attainment of Stage E would give weight to the fundraising case and increase its chances of success. Although potentially difficult to manage, he conceded that a slow down on project expenditure might be possible.

In order to clarify the position, Ms Whitaker summarised the current fundraising position, giving an indication of prospective donations and when funds might begin to be available during the development of the project.

There was concern over the £7 million in funds attributed to sale of assets and the level of contingency provision. Mr Greenwood confirmed that the asset sale was feasible and would be necessary even if the project were abandoned, in order to fund refurbishment of botany and entomology. It need not occur immediately, but could be part of the discussion in September over what shortfall the Museum would wish to cover if it arose. With regard to the level of contingency, Lord Palumbo commented that it was perhaps lower than expected, but that this reflected the degree of confidence in the management of the project. Mr Greenwood also confirmed that the £65 million was totally inclusive of consequential costs relating to issues such as staff relocation.

Trustees enquired about confidence amongst the botany and entomology staff that the project would satisfy their requirements. Dr Lane confirmed that any reservations about housing the collections were now largely dispelled, though there were admittedly still issues over the housing of staff. These were being actively addressed, not least within Stage E, and he had every confidence that the building would be as successful for the functioning of science research as Phase One.

In conclusion, Trustees gave their unanimous support for the project. They agreed that it should proceed to the detailed design stage E with a further review meeting in September 2004 to discuss whether to proceed with Option 1 or adopt fallback option 4. In the meantime, fundraising for the project should continue apace, but given the issues raised in their discussion, Trustees asked for an update at their May meeting on areas where expenditure might be minimised. In the meantime they asked that a close relationship continue between the project team, botanists and entomologists in order to provide the best result for all parties and that the Director keep the new Director, Dr Dixon, informed of the project's progress, since he would ultimately be responsible for delivering it.

The meeting was then joined by members of the Museum's Policy Group, not already present; Professor Bateman, Professor Fleet, Dr Bloomfield, Ms Gay, Mr Higley, Mr Jenkinson, Ms Kidd, Dr Macleod, Mr Paskin, Professor Rainbow, Mr Rellis, Mr Thorpe, Ms Wild and Mr Vane-Wright.

779 PRICEWATERHOUSECOOPERS REPORT ON PROCUREMENT ISSUES IN THE MUSEUM

(This section to be made available in April 2014)

780 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next ordinary board meeting would take place on Thursday 13 May 2004 at 10.00 at The Natural History Museum.