British Museum unveils the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre

11/07/2014

Following the successful launch of the new Sainsbury Exhibitions Gallery in March with a major exhibition on the Vikings, the British Museum today unveils the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre (WCEC). Designed by Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners (RSHP) and constructed by Mace, the new centre cements the British Museum's reputation as a world leader in the exhibition, conservation, examination and analysis of cultural objects from across the globe. Almost four years in the making, the WCEC will enable the Museum to build on current successes, to store, conserve, study and display the collection for the future.

The total cost of the project was £135million. The Linbury Trust, established by John Sainsbury (Lord Sainsbury of Preston Candover KG), and the Monument Trust, established by Simon Sainsbury together committed £25million towards the project, one of the largest gifts to the arts in the UK in recent decades, which was used to fund the Sainsbury Exhibitions Gallery. The Heritage Lottery Fund has committed £10million towards the project. Other significant benefactors include, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the Wolfson Foundation, the A.G. Leventis Foundation and the family of Constantine Leventis, the Clothworkers' Foundation, Sir Siegmund Warburg's Voluntary Settlement, the British Museum Friends and others as well as continued support from the Department for Culture Media and Sport (worth £22.5million over four years).

Located in the north-west corner of the museum's Bloomsbury estate, the WCEC is one of the largest redevelopment projects in the museum's 260 year history. In addition to the new public exhibitions gallery, the centre provides state-of-the-art laboratories and studios, world class stores for the collection, as well as facilities to support an extensive UK and international loan programme. These spaces will greatly improve the museum's operations on-site, modernise facilities 'behind the scenes' and allow the museum to extend support to UK and international partners by increasing capacity for staff training and joint projects.

The building consists of five pavilions (one of which is submerged below the ground) in a contemporary design that responds sensitively to the British Museum's existing architecture, connecting to the historic building whilst maintaining its own identity.

The kiln-formed glass and Portland stone used on the pavilions are inspired by the materials of the existing buildings and the shaded façade subtly reveals the activities within. The mass and height of the pavilions are designed to create an easy visual transition from the grand scale of the museum to the more domestic proportions of the the predominantly eighteenth century properties in the neighbouring streets.

British Museum Director, Neil MacGregor, said: "The World Conservation and Exhibtions Centre is an important – and beautiful – addition to Bloomsbury. Rogers, Stirk, Harbour + Partners and Mace have designed and delivered a wonderfully flexible building which provides the museum with the facilities it needs to achieve our future ambitions. I am grateful to all of our extremely generous donors who have enabled us to undertake this project and all of the staff who have worked so hard to bring it to fruition."

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of the Heritage Lottery Fund, said: “The impact and benefits of this new centre were clearly evident when the Vikings exhibition opened in the spring. As one of the main funders, we’re delighted that the building has been so well-received, adding a world-class facility to the British Museum estate. We have been particularly impressed with the museum’s on-going commitment to widening its engagement with domestic and international audiences. The results are clear to see in the increasing visitor figures, and the number of items lent by, and to, the museum.”

Graham Stirk, lead architect and Senior Partner, Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners, said: “The need for versatility, as well as sensitivity to the historical context, underpinned our thinking throughout the design process of the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre. We are very proud of the building, which offers a flexible series of spaces that support the wide range of activities currently undertaken by the British Museum and can adapt to changing requirements over time.”

Gareth Lewis, Chief Operating Officer for Construction at Mace, said: “In constructing the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre (WCEC), we were given the rare privilege to contribute to the development of the Museum’s future. The project could not have been completed without collaboration with our partners. We are delighted that we have helped to transform a visionary design into a dynamic space.”

Arup designed the building services which include the highly sophisticated environmental controls and energy related design features. In addition, Arup has provided engineering advice on Fire, Acoustics, Security, Lighting and Vertical Transportation.

Notes to editors

At approximately 18,000sqm, the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre provides four key functions:

- **The Sainsbury Exhibitions Gallery:** Over the last six years the museum has established a strong reputation for housing large-scale, important exhibitions that allow visitors to deepen their understanding of world cultures. The centre builds on this success, including a purpose built special exhibitions gallery of approximately 1,100sqm. The Sainsbury Exhibitions Gallery opened in March 2014 with a major exhibition on the Vikings (supported by BP). Vikings will be followed by the BP exhibition Ming: 50 years that changed China which opens in September 2014. The exhibitions gallery is situated in pavilions 2–4 and is publicly accessible via the north side of the Great Court
- **Conservation Studios and Science Laboratories:** Museum conservators and scientists work to conserve the collection for present and future generations and to provide insights into the past through research centred on examination and analysis of objects. Conservation and scientific research activities at the museum have expanded enormously over the past 40 years, with the advent of new technology, improved techniques and broader professional expertise. The WCEC includes state-of-the-art studios, laboratories and equipment for conservation and scientific research, which allow the museum not only to improve and extend the care and study of its own collection, but also to offer support to our UK and international partners through increased capacity for staff training and joint projects. A particular feature of the new facilities is that they permit the museum to undertake the treatment and examination of large-scale objects, from the Michelangelo cartoon, through wooden canoes, coffins and totem poles to complex sculptures or large assemblages such as coin hoards. The science laboratories are housed principally in the fifth pavilion, with equipment and activities that are sensitive to vibration located at the lowest basement level. Other laboratories and offices surround a day lit atrium, while the conservation studios are situated at the top of pavilions 1–4 to make maximum use of natural light

- **Storage:** The collection is the cornerstone of the museum. The WCEC will include world-class, environmentally controlled stores (approximately 5,100sqm) to house the study collection and to allow greater access to this material. The museum currently stores its collections across three sites in London: at the main site in Bloomsbury and in two off-site locations. The new centre enables the museum to bring more of the collection back to the Bloomsbury site, including the majority of fragile and sensitive organic material. New on-site facilities provide improved access to the collections, as well as modern, environmentally controlled systems able to maintain the stable conditions necessary for the preservation of these objects. Each level of storage has a study room where objects can be seen and studied. The stores will house over 200,000 objects from the Africa, Oceania and Americas Department and stone inscriptions and archaeological fragments from the Department of Greece and Rome
- **Collections hub**: The British Museum is committed to lending the collection as widely as possible. The Centre features a centralised object handling facility with a loading bay and associated packing, unpacking and work spaces for the receipt and despatch of objects. Within the Centre, objects will be managed centrally, allowing the safer and more efficient transfer of the many thousands of objects brought into and sent out of the Museum each year. A bespoke truck lift (one of the largest in Europe) accessed from Montague Place will be operational in September 2014. The lift will facilitate the transfer of objects and secure loading bays will provide direct access to the new exhibitions gallery, conservation and science storage and to the rest of the Museum. Also included in this area is a dedicated suite of isolation and treatment rooms to prevent insect pests entering and damaging the collection

Building work and timeline

Work on the WCEC site began in December 2010. After a period of demolition work to clear the area, and the excavation of approximately 37,000m³ of material, the construction of the building's four basement levels began. The installation of the steel frame commenced in the autumn 2012, and in February 2013 the project celebrated 'Topping Out', marking the point at which the roof was on the building.

December 2010 – Demolition works began
Spring 2011 – Construction of basement levels commences
Autumn 2012 – Construction above ground level begins
Autumn 2013 – Construction complete
Autumn 2013 – Installation of furniture and equipment
Spring 2014 – Start to move into building
March 2014 – First exhibition opens in new gallery
July 2014 - Building fully occupied and operational.

The constantly changing site has been recorded through the work of the project artist-in-residence Liam O'Connor. Liam has been documenting the site since work began in December 2010 and has developed two major drawings. One is an evolving view of the site throughout construction and the other is a drawing of the excavation work; a view of the site as a single vast space revealed during the construction process.

About RSHP
Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners (RSHP) is an award-winning, international architectural practice based in London. Over the past three decades, RSHP has attracted critical acclaim with innovative projects across Europe, Asia, Australasia and North America. The practice is experienced in designing a wide range of building types including office, residential, transport, education, culture, leisure, retail, civic and healthcare. The quality of its designs has been recognised with

some of architecture’s highest awards, including two RIBA Stirling Prizes for Terminal 4 at Madrid Barajas Airport in 2006 and Maggie’s Cancer Care Centre, London in 2009.

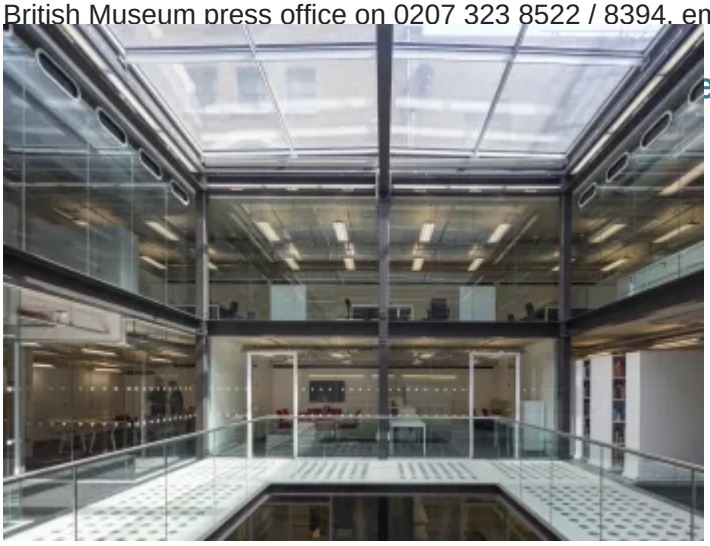
About Mace
Mace is an international consultancy and construction company employing over 4,000 people, across five continents with a turnover in excess of £1billion. Mace’s business is programme and project management, cost consultancy, construction delivery and facilities management and is truly multi-disciplinary with services spanning the entire property and infrastructure lifecycle. Mace has three strategic sectors serving clients in the private, public and infrastructure sectors and five strategic hubs in Europe, Middle East & North Africa, the Americas, Asia Pacific and Sub-Sahara Africa that service over 70 countries.

About Arup
Arup’s work is at the heart of many of the world's most prominent projects in the built environment and across industry. From 90 offices in 38 countries, Arup’s 11,000 planners, designers, engineers and consultants deliver innovative projects across the world.

Further information

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The British Museum World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre

British Museum Centre benefits from Heritage Lottery Fund grant