British Museum Centre benefits from Heritage Lottery Fund grant

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HLF have confirmed* a £10m grant for the new World Conservation and Exhibition Centre (WCEC) at the British Museum. This generous grant means the project is more than 80% funded through philanthropy and underwriting totalling £118m out of the total project costs of £135m raised. The centre is due to open in spring 2014 with a special exhibition on the Vikings supported by BP.

The WCEC is a hugely important project for the British Museum. Designed by Rogers, Stirk, Harbour + Partners, the Centre will house state of-the-art laboratories and studios for the conservation, preservation and research of the collection; a new special exhibitions suite; world-class stores, and facilities to support the Museum's extensive national and international loans programme.

Andrew Burnett, Deputy Director and Project Champion said 'The World Conservation and Exhibition Centre will provide world class facilities for both visitors and the staff who occupy it and enable the museum to care for its unique collection to the highest possible standards It will equip the Museum for the 21st century, taking conservation, scientific research, collection management and exhibitions to a new level of efficiency and excellence while greatly enhancing the Museum's capacity for regional and international scholarship and collaborations.'

Dame Jenny Abramsky, Chair of HLF, said: "The Heritage Lottery Fund's grant for the WCEC will have a dramatic impact upon the British Museum's facilities for conservation, scientific research, storage and loans. The centre will vastly improve the British Museum's ability to care for the most fragile parts of its collections in the best possible conditions and will get more people involved in its work."

Funding from HLF will provide vital facilities and resources which will enable the Museum to expand its innovative outreach and public engagement. The Museum has a very active local and national programme but the lack of suitable spaces for visitors to go 'behind the scenes' means that it has not been able to satisfy demand. Funding from HLF will create an extensive programme of activities involving visitors, volunteers and community groups, including tours of the conservation studios and science laboratories and object handling sessions around new special exhibitions. HLF's support will also underpin improvements to the Museum's public digital resources, and put object conservation live on the internet for the first time.

The WCEC is located on one of the last available spaces for expansion on the Museum's historic Bloomsbury site. It will consist of five pavilion buildings situated on the northwest corner of the site (over a space of 17,000 sqm) Work on the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre site began in Spring 2010. Following a period of demolition work to clear the area, an archaeological excavation took place before work to construct the substructure commenced in 2011.

Prior to starting the basement excavation, 482 concrete piles were laid around the perimeter of the site to form a secant wall, or water tight basement box, for the three basement levels of the new Centre. At their deepest point, the piles extended 35m into the ground. More than half the new building will be below ground.

Approximately 37,000m3 of excavated material needs to be removed from site, which equates to over 4,000 lorry loads. Excavation is now more than half way through, with more than 2,000 lorry loads cleared. This has allowed construction of the new building to begin, and concrete to form the bottom of the basement floor has been poured in more than half the site.

The construction of the basement levels will be ongoing for the next several months.
In parallel to the construction activity, the design team continues to progress the building design. With the exterior and technical design elements broadly in place, the team is focussing on the interior and fit-out of the new building – from the light-filled conservation studios at the top of the Centre, to the specialised scientific laboratories at the bottom, and the spacious temporary exhibition gallery (1,100sqm) which will be accessed via the Great Court. Construction will not cause the closure of any public space.

Notes to Editors
* A confirmed award means that money had already been earmarked by HLF for the project in question and that the full amount has now been secured.

Status of Fundraising: The Museum has received a range of generous donations to fund the WCEC in addition to the grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Linbury Trust and Monument Trust (affiliated to the Sainsbury Family) have committed £25 million towards the project, one of the largest gifts to the arts in the UK in recent decades. Other significant benefactors include the Wolfson Foundation, Garfield Weston Foundation, A.G. Leventis Foundation and the family of Constantine Leventis, as well as continued support from the Department for Culture Media and Sport (worth £22.5 million over 4 years). The Museum has yet to launch a public campaign and is hopeful that it will continue to attract support.

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The British Museum World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre

British Museum unveils the World Conservation and Exhibitions Centre