

Minutes of SMG Board of Trustees Meeting
Held in the Smith Centre, Science Museum on
Wednesday 4 December 2024

Present:

SMG Trustees

Sir Tim Laurence (Chair)
James Bilefield
Tim Dugher
Judith Donovan
Professor Anya Hurlbert
Iain McIntosh
Professor Greg Radick
Baroness Nicky Morgan
Sarah Staniforth
Sarah Sands
Steven Underwood (*By MS Teams*)

In attendance:

SMG Executive

Sir Ian Blatchford, Director & Chief Executive
Shri Mukundagiri, Chief Operating Officer
Nicolas Raynaud, Director of Finance and Corporate Services
Peter Dickinson, Director of Communications
Deborah Myers, Director of Development
Anna Dejean, Masterplan Director
Sally MacDonald, Director, Science & Industry Museum (SIM)
Judith McNicol, Director, National Railway Museum (NRM)
Jo Quinton-Tulloch, Director of National Science and Media Museum (NSMM)

Sian Thompson, Board Secretary (*Minutes*)

David Jacob, Chair, Science Museum Foundation (*Observer*)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies had been received from Professor Stephen Belcher, Professor Washington Ochieng and Professor Ajit Lalvani.

2. Declarations of interest

None.

3. Draft Minutes of SMG Board Meeting on 8 October 2024 and SMG Strategy Day on 9 October 2024, Action Tracker and Items for Consideration

The papers circulated previously were noted. In addition:

- It was noted that all actions outstanding from the previous meeting had been completed or were due at a later date.
- **The minutes were approved** and would be signed by the Chair (**Action: TL / ST**)

4. SMG Chair's Update

A verbal update was received, and the following points noted:

- The Chair had recently attended the DCMS ALBs Chairs Away Day at the Royal Armouries. There was no firm news yet on the second phase of Government's Spending Review to set budgets for future years.
- The Chair would soon be meeting with the Chairs of the Natural History Museum and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, to discuss environmental sustainability.
- The Board heard an update from the Partnership Committee on indictments relating to AGE. There was a full discussion, and it was noted that the Committee would continue to monitor the matter and bring any notable developments to the attention of the Board. The Board supported the preparation of defensive briefing material in case of any new developments on this issue.
- It was noted that **the Board had approved** the recommendations of the Remuneration Committee in its

closed session.

5. SMG Director's Report

The papers circulated previously were noted. In addition:

- The *Versailles* exhibition would be opening at the Science Museum later that week. The pre-launch publicity had been very positive.
- The Landmark Trust had recently received a National Railway Heritage Award for its restoration of the Station Agent's House at SIM.
- The Power Hall at SIM would re-open in time for the summer holidays, which would help capitalise on visit numbers. The VIP opening would be moved to October 2025.
- NSMM had collaborated with Aardman to develop some special Wallace and Gromit content for the NSMM's reopening. The Chair would invite Aardman representatives to join an upcoming tour of the Hawking Building at SIP. **(Action: TL)**
- A correction to the report was noted in that NCMME visit numbers were performing at 90% of target (instead of being down by 90%).
- The Board discussed the challenges faced by the Central Hall project at NRM. It was noted that the delays in the stopping-up order of Leeman Road and uncertainty around funding from Government meant that this project presented a big risk to SMG. The Board heard that SMG would be participating in the consultation with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) following Government's decision to pause £15m funding to help deliver the project. The Board also noted that a number of letters would be issued to key contacts within Government to support the NRM funding request. **(Action: IB)**
- Discussions continued with Durham County Council regarding their committed funding for New Hall at Locomotion.

6. SMG Financial Sustainability

The papers circulated previously were noted. In addition:

- The Board noted the overall financial challenges set out in the papers. It was noted that all national museums relied on Grant-in-Aid as a primary source of funding, and consequently funding cuts, combined with other factors, e.g. falling visit numbers across the sector in Summer 2024 and consequent impact on income, had created a difficult financial position for all national museums including SMG.
- **It was agreed** that a recent presentation received by the SMG Finance & Business Committee on visit numbers would be updated and shared with trustees at the next Board meeting. **(Action: PD / ST)**
- The Board was consulted on the range of options available to SMG (as outlined in the paper). On liquidity considerations, **it was agreed** that management should explore a portfolio approach of options listed in the paper (but not including the cash receipts from the York Land Sale).
- The formal 'comfort letter' from DCMS was discussed. The Board supported management's approach to continue ongoing discussions with Government officials on its long-term financial sustainability.
- Following discussions with DCMS officials in early 2025, the SMG Chair and SMG Director (as Accounting Officer), along with senior finance colleagues, would make a recommendation to the Board. **(Action: TL / IB / SMu / NR)**

7. Rivan Industries Lease at Science + Innovation Park

The papers circulated previously were noted. In addition:

- The project and its supporting lease aligned with the objectives of the Park and was supported by the SMG Masterplan & Estates Committee.
- It was confirmed that Rivan staff would be based in the Hackpen offices.
- **The Board approved** the lease arrangements, subject to necessary approval from DCMS.

8. Horrible Science at SIM

The papers circulated previously were noted. In addition:

- It was noted that *Horrible Science* was a much-loved children's educational brand that had strong alignment with SMG values.
- The project was also supported by the SMG Finance and Business Committee, thanks to strong projections for both ticketing and sponsorship income.
- **The Board approved** the project budget.

9. **Discoveries Gallery at Science Museum**

The papers circulated previously were noted. In addition:

- The project would replace the existing *Making the Modern World* gallery at the Science Museum. The existing gallery had been a Millennium project and was very popular with visitors, and consequently was due a refresh. A discussion was had regarding the importance of replacing the free offer for museum visitors.
- **The Board approved** the Gateway 1 proposal for the project, noting the budget authority approved by the Finance and Business Committee to proceed to the end of RIBA Stage 2 Concept Design.
- A joint meeting of the SMG Finance and Business Committee and the SMG Masterplan & Estate Committee would also review the project again in early 2025, particularly in the context of the SMG Masterplan and project delivery overall across the whole SMG estate.

10. **SMG Human Remains Policy**

The papers circulated previously were noted. In addition:

- The Board discussed the importance of the issue, particularly in terms of cultural sensitivities. It was noted that SMG's policy aligned with best practice within the wider museum and heritage sector, and that the Wellcome Trust had been consulted on SMG's approach.
- **The Board approved** the updated policy.

11. **SMG Fellowship Nomination Committee Recommendations**

The papers circulated previously were noted. **The Board approved** the recommendations.

12. **Terms of Reference Approvals**

The papers circulated previously were noted. In addition:

- **The Terms of Reference were approved** (as outlined in the paper).
- A discussion was also had regarding other upcoming changes to SMG's governance structure. It was noted that Terms of Reference for other committees and groups would be presented for approval at future Board meetings through the course of 2025.

13. **AOB**

- It was agreed to reinstate the SMG Performance Report on the SMG Board agenda at a future meeting. **(Action: SMu / ST)**.
- Judith McNicol (Director, NRM) would soon be leaving SMG after nearly 20 years of service. The Board warmly thanked Judith for her excellent contributions and achievements during her time at SMG.

Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 12 March 2025