

**THE TRUSTEES OF THE NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM**

**THREE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-SEVENTH MEETING**

**THURSDAY 21 NOVEMBER 2024**

HELD IN THE BOARDROOM

**MINUTES**

**Trustees present:**

Lance Batchelor (Chair)  
Professor Clare Anderson  
Dr Fiona Butcher  
Dr Helen Czerski  
Sir Stephen Deuchar  
Professor Julian Dowdeswell  
Matthew Hastings (Board Apprentice)  
Murdoch MacLennan  
William Nye (Via MS Teams)  
Professor Andrew Thompson (Via MS Teams)

**Guests:**

Professor Emma Bunce (Prospective Trustee)  
Dr Julia Mundy (Prospective Trustee)

**In attendance:**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>
Paddy Rodgers	CEO, Royal Museums Greenwich
Chris Walker	Executive Business & Operations Director
Gail Symington	Executive Creative Director (for items 8 & 10)
Jane Costantini	Head of Governance and Museum Records
Karen Eden-Tuxford	Head of Commerce & Visitor Experience (item 7)
Ann Carter	Director of Major Projects (for item 10)
Lucy Cooke	Head of Development (for item 10)
Emma Snow	Design Manager First Light (for item 10)
Elizabeth Avery	Deputy Head of Astronomy, Vision and Reach (item 10)
Claire Warrior	Senior Content Curator (for item 10)

**~Governance Session~**

**1. Apologies and welcome**

Apologies were received from Alastair Marsh, Trustee, and Professor Teresa Anderson, prospective Trustee.  
Dr Julia Mundy and Professor Emma Bunce were welcomed to the Board as guests, pending the completion of the final paperwork from DCMS.

**2. Declaration of relevant interests related to this meeting**

No relevant interests were declared.

**3. Draft Minutes of Board meeting 386 of 22 July 2024**

Professor Anderson noted that she had been incorrectly omitted from the list of attendees for the July meeting. The Board **agreed** the minutes to be a true record of the meeting apart from the above omission. The amended minutes were certified by the Chair accordingly.

#### **4. Report from the Remuneration and Nominations Committee**

The Chair of the Remuneration and Nominations Committee thanked Matthew Hastings for his tenure as the Board's first Apprentice and for his contributions to the meetings during the year. Thanks were also given to Fiona Butcher who was Matthew's 'Board Buddy' this year. Following Matthew's successful apprenticeship we have signed up for the scheme again in 2025 and should hear shortly who the new incumbent will be.

Trustees were reminded that in 2026 we shall lose three Trustees as Fiona Butcher, Helen Czerski and Julian Dowdeswell will step down after two terms in September. Alastair Marsh has decided to step down at the next meeting in February 2025. The remaining six Trustees from the 2022 cohort will be due to be considered for reappointment in 2026. Trustees were asked to approve the proposals set out in the paper, namely that:

- unless in exceptional circumstances, we do not recruit more than two Trustees at a time (consequently meaning that we never lose more than two at a time);
- to minimise the risk of a mass exodus in 2030, Trustees from the 2022 cohort might consider variable terms for their second period of tenure if reappointed. This, we understand will be possible, so periods of tenure might vary from between two and four years, or exceptionally even five years. Trustees from this group are asked to consider whether this might be something they would be interested in, in due course. The process for reappointments will commence late spring/early summer 2025, so whilst there is no immediate urgency, it will be something we would like to follow up on in the coming months.

These proposals were **approved** by the Board and the Chairman undertook to discuss this with individuals in the coming months.

#### **5. Director's Report**

The Director informed Trustees that since issuing his written report we had received Planning Permission and Planning Consent for the First Light project. On Ocean Court the glazing is going well and we are on track to re-open for World Oceans Day in June 2025.

Unfortunately, visitor numbers are still below last year by around 15% but the October half term numbers were encouraging. Visitor satisfaction remains high. The Senior Leadership Team have been asked to put recruitment on hold until we have a clear picture of our spending for the next year.

Trustees suggested that the management team might consider doing a sensitivity analysis. The Director stated that next year's discretionary activities will have to be put on hold until we can be sure we have the resources to fulfil them. He added that the recent sudden death of Dr Robert Blyth had been a shock to the organisation and a realisation of our over-dependency on one person. The Chair of the Collections and Research Committee, Professor Dowdeswell agreed that we had lost some key

members of staff in this area in the last few years. Hiring people with good presentation skills should be considered a prerequisite for these types of roles in future.

*This section has been redacted in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 s. 36 prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*

There were no further questions and the Chairman thanked the Director for his report which was duly **noted**.

**6. Proposals for future Board meetings**

Trustees considered the various options for future Board meetings. Additional online meetings in the future were not ruled out but a consensus was found around extending the duration of the scheduled quarterly meetings in the first instance to see if this allowed more time to cover the agenda as well as the potential to see things outside of the Boardroom. Time to discuss strategy was also flagged as a future requirement.

**7. Finance Report**

**7.1 Visitor numbers**

The Head of Commerce and Visitor Experience provided the Board with a brief overview of visitor performance over the last quarter.

We welcomed just under 670,000 visitors in Quarter 2 across our core sites, which was down 34,000 against our forecast and down 100,000 against last year. There are some site-specific reasons for the lower than hoped performance: the Ocean Court closure and the works in Greenwich Park have impacted negatively at the NMM and ROG respectively. Conversely the Queen's House seems to have benefited from the NMM front entrance closure, with visitor numbers 45,000 ahead of forecast.

ALVA (Association of Leading Visitor Attractions) has reported that summer trading was mixed across the sector with an average drop in visitor numbers of 6% against last year, and London sites were more negatively impacted than elsewhere in the UK. The Olympics, Euros and other major sporting events, poor weather, exchange rates and strong performance last year are all considered significant factors for attendance figures this year. Overall we are at 84% of 2019 visitor numbers (NMM is 72%); ALVA are reporting that the average across the sector is 92%. Our visitor forecast for the whole 2024-25 year has been reduced to just over two million (400,000 less than last year).

Secondary spend was still positive however despite the drop in visitors with the catering unit at The Cove producing turnover sales of £80,000 and the Meridian shop generating turnover of £662,000.

There were no questions from the Board and the Chairman thanked the Head of Commerce and Visitor Experience for her presentation.

## 7.2 September Management accounts and Forecast update

The Executive Business & Operations Director told Trustees that we have found it difficult to grow the visitor numbers to the *Cutty Sark* over the 250,000 mark, but we have been working hard at our offer on the ship more recently.

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Trustees were informed that the fundraising environment was also proving difficult and our expectations in this area have consequently had to reduce.

The current overall forecast for the 2024-25 financial year is that we will end with a deficit just short of £3m.

Turning to our Reserves, the Executive Business & Operations Director explained the two columns relating to RMG and RMG Foundation respectively. Historically, Trustees have resolved to grant RMG surpluses to RMGF. RMGF have now designated £2.5m for M&E work relating to the Ocean Court project and a total of £5m for First Light and therefore have £5.3m remaining. At 1 April 2024, RMG had £3m in unrestricted reserves and £7.6m in designated reserves. If we do finish with a £2.5m+ deficit we may have to consider undesignating some of the other funds.

The Executive Business & Operations Director concluded by sharing some initial thoughts regarding next year's outlook. Ocean Court will open in June, bringing back our young visitors to Ahoy! We shall open our Pirates exhibition in March, hoping for 50,000 visitors at a yield of £10 per head. Our prices will increase in January to £22 at the *Cutty Sark* and £24 at ROG.

In response to a question regarding the content of the Pirates exhibition, the Director stated that we had been hoping to have a standalone exhibition dedicated to the subject of modern piracy but for various reasons this has had to be pared back and it would now be included as part of the main exhibition.

There were no further questions and the Chairman thanked the Executive Business & Operations Director for his update which was **noted**.

**8. Ocean Court update**

This item was taken after item 10.

**9. Risk: Organisational overstretch**

This item was postponed until the next meeting.

**10. 'First Light' Update**

Phasing

The Board were taken through the latest thinking on the possible phasing of the project if we find that we do not have the funds to complete the project in one go.

**Phase 1: South** would cover all planned interventions to the South Building including the Garden Walk, Astronomers' Court, Galleries, PHP refurbishment, Retail, Café, toilets, external building conservation (including roof repairs) and the Altazimuth Pavilion.

**Phase 2: Central** encompasses the Entrance Pavilion and Garden Walk, Great Equatorial Building Access, the Meridian Building first floor gallery and Retail, the Meridian Observatory, the surrounding outside spaces and the external fabric conservation to the Meridian Building

**Phase 3: North** includes Flamsteed House basement, galleries and apartments and roof, the Meridian Courtyard and the Café kiosk.

One advantage of the phasing is that it will allow us to keep the Meridian line open. Trustees were keen to know whether Phase 1 could include the Entrance Pavilion as this is considered a priority and were told that in terms of the budget the initial £44m would include the Pavilion but there is a question over access to the central and north sites once the Pavilion is in place. In response to a query regarding funding conditions, the Board was told that the NLHF expect the project to be complete within five years of grant approval.

Trustees **approved** this phased approach in principle with a commitment from the management team to come back at February's Board with further details including the impact on costs.

Closure:

The Deputy Head of Astronomy: Vision and Reach took Trustees through the plans for the closure period which aim to retain the expertise of our staff, maintain our connections with our audiences and minimise the reduction in income during closure. Current ideas being explored are using the Lecture Theatre at NMM for a Science Theatre; using an inflatable Planetarium dome in the Special Exhibitions Gallery; using meeting rooms at NMM for classes and workshops and using the NMM grounds for various outdoor activities. We are also looking at using the 'Icons Gallery' to show our star objects including the Harrison timekeepers.

*Murdoch MacLennan left the meeting at this point.*

#### Content

Next the Senior Content Curator provided an overview of the current thinking around gallery content with key themes: Light, Matter, Motion, Science, Time and Longitude.

Trustees were keen to know what the 'wow' factors will be and cautioned that interpretation methods date quickly so it is important to get some peer reviews of our ideas before proceeding. Furthermore, if we are to go down the phased approach, we should not get too far ahead with our gallery designs for phases two and three as we will incur costs for designs which might become outdated before we get to complete them. This was acknowledged as a risk but equally it was noted that in order to attract funders ideas need to be developed to a certain point.

The Director agreed that it was important to have these discussions now rather than after opening and was delighted at the prospect of our two new Astronomy Trustees joining Helen Czerski and Chris Lintott in the discussion on content development.

*Professor Thompson left the meeting at this point.*

The discussion was brought to a close with a brief update on fundraising developments (Trustees had received a written update prior to the meeting). The Director thanked the Head of Development and her team for their work and achievements to date. He noted that there is a great deal of goodwill from DCMS towards the project and we were looking forward to several big events in the new year. The Head of Development added that Chris Bryant, Minister of State for Media, Tourism and Creative Industries also has a foot in DSIT (Department for Science, Innovation & Technology) and there is currently a lot of interest in PNT (Positioning, Navigation and Timing) technology which we may be able to tap into.

The Chairman and Board thanked the RMG team and the FL Trustee Committee for their hard work over the last period.

#### **8. Ocean Court update**

The Executive Business & Operations Director updated the Board on the infrastructure part of the project which is on track to complete the majority of physical works at the end of March 2025, prior to commissioning. The house lighting will be replaced but replacing the key cooling plant has proved unaffordable at this time but we are hoping that a range of other interventions will improve the environmental conditions of the Court.

Next the Executive Creative Director provided an update on progress since the last Board meeting on the non-infrastructure parts of the project. We are aiming for a new bold paint finish to the walls which surround the Court pending permission from Historic England and Royal Borough Greenwich (decision expected by mid-January). The Great Map, popular with families, will come back with a new look which is currently being developed.

The Board were informed that Dr Czerksi has been involved in bringing together a group of ocean experts to help us to support our visitors in developing ocean literacy. Helen's contribution (unpaid) was duly recognised and noted by the Board. We are planning changes to west street and the Reliant engine will be removed to free up space for a testing ground for new approaches to ocean content. We are planning a series of opening events and a five month public programme of activities.

Trustees asked whether the Ocean Court funding from Government would cover this additional work and were told it would not.

There were no further questions and the Chairman thanked the Directors for their updates.

**13. Matters arising from the information in Volume B/AOB**

There were no matters arising from the information in Volume B.

There was no time for the in camera session for Trustees which was postponed for the next meeting.

Minutes certified by Lance Batchelor, Chairman 27 February 2025