SCIENCE MUSEUM GROUP

BT 4 March 2015
Agenda 8

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Title of paper: **National Media Museum – next steps**

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Date: 10 February 2015

To the Board for: **Consultation** Briefing Report Decision

The Board is asked to note for discussion

Summary/key points

The Board last reviewed the Museum at its meeting in June 2014.

Since then further work has been undertaken to see how its STEM focus could be strengthened. This paper outlines how that science narrative can be enhanced further and how this also has implications for naming and collections.

The Museum needs to position itself crisply around the STEM agenda, to reflect the aspirations of the regional community and make a much stronger case for a sustainable level of government funding. Therefore, this paper proposes the following:

- That the collection narrative evolves from the 'still and moving image' to encompass the ***science/technology of 'light and sound'***;
- That the Museum consults key partners on the idea of becoming '[redacted]',
- Implementing a recent collection recommendation to make a distinction in the photography holdings between **science & technology (remain in Bradford) and the artistic & cultural practices of the image (move to London to support Media Space)**.

1.0 Science and Technology of Light and Sound

The existing core technology collections of the Museum are the starting point for this exercise. There are currently three categories: photographic technology, cinematography and television. There are also holdings of 'New Media' technology, including gaming and computing, animation, and pre-cinema and material relating to the use of optics for popular entertainment.

The intention is to build out from these collections to:

1. collect contemporary digital technologies in the continuing traditions of photography, cinematography and television, documenting the transformation of these industries as it happens; and
2. broaden the scope of the programming to include the application of imaging and sound technologies in an extensive range of other sectors and contexts.

Developments in digital technologies over the last 30 years have produced a number of disruptive innovations into the established industries and markets of photography, film and television. We want to collect the technology that is transforming these sectors, documenting this change, and preserving the key technologies for current and future use in telling the story of an important moment in the history of science and technology.

The Museum has collected imaging and sound technologies as applied in the popular entertainment industries in both professional and amateur practice. Although there are examples of applications in scientific, medical and industrial contexts, this represents a very small quantity of the overall collections, and practically none of the contemporary material.

We will broaden our mindset to include imaging/sound technologies such as scientific (e.g. spectroscopy, astrophotography), medical (e.g. radiology) and security/military (e.g. surveillance) contexts. The Museum's collecting has also generally focused in images that are made with visible light and sound within the range of human hearing. We propose to broaden this to include imaging across the electromagnetic spectrum (including x-ray, ultraviolet, infrared) and across sound frequencies (including ultrasound).

These aspirations centre more around loans and programming rather than a vast collecting spree especially as the Science Museum in London has strong holdings. These areas also provide the scope for collaborations with regional partners such as Bradford University.

2.0 Renaming the National Media Museum

The Museum was established in 1983 as the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television. In 2006 it re-branded to become the National Media Museum (NMeM), with an aim to be the best museum in the world for inspiring people to learn about, engage with and create media. It was focused on helping audiences to explore the artistic, technological, social and cultural impact of media, and on building media literacy and developing media skills.

Following the review in 2013/14, it became clear that realignment with the STEM agenda would support a much clearer vision, with greater opportunity for development and growth. At this time it was suggested that the title of the Museum would need to be considered to support the shift in purpose and repositioning.

While the current name was appropriate for the ambitions of the organisation in 2006, the next phase of the Museum must re-focus on science and technology – politically this strengthens the opportunities of the Group as a whole; strategically it aligns with the ambitions of key stakeholders such as Bradford Council; operationally it allows for better use and sharing of resources across the Group.

The current name is a barrier. It stops us being taken seriously in the science world, lacks regional support and impact, [redacted].

Changing our name would be a significant move. At this stage there are some assumptions that can be drawn from the work to date:

- The new title must support the shift to STEM
- The new title must support the collections/curatorial agenda
- The new title must strengthen (and make explicit) the relationship between the Museum and the [redacted]

The Group Executive discussed these issues at its meeting on 27th January and there was a strong feeling that a title such as [redacted] would be promising.

The [redacted] and it would instantly denote the Group's commitment to the City and strengthen the perception of a [redacted]. The name is also generous enough in scope to allow the Museum to take touring exhibitions on a wide range of scientific subjects (e.g. *3D Printing*, *Graphene*, *Cravings*).

There was less enthusiasm for the concept of [redacted] because this creates confusing comparisons with what the Group is doing [redacted]

At a recent meeting with the Leader and Chief Executive of Bradford Council, together with the Group Director, we took initial sounding and concluded that we are likely to receive a positive response to these proposals.

If the Board is supportive of these proposals then we will commence a discreet consultation of key local partners and audience testing after Easter.

3.0 Content and Timing Issues

Any change must also be accompanied by a demonstrable change in public offer. The Board will also want to consider if we hold the renaming opportunity as a 'win' for a new government (along with a commitment to secure a more sustainable funding base).

Currently, although the temporary programming and learning activities are STEM focused, the core permanent offer within the Museum has little or no science/technology content. Therefore, there is a risk that a brand/name change would not become embedded in the local and national conscience, and the significant investment in renaming would not be effective.

The first phase of our Masterplan will be the delivery of a **new hands-on interactive gallery** that will provide visitors with the opportunity to experiment with exhibits that demonstrate the scientific principles of light, sound and perception. This new gallery will be a major attraction and will provide new ways to engage with the science in the collections. It will also be a crucial element in the Museum's aspiration to support STEM education in schools, providing a valuable learning resource for children, parents and teachers.

The opening might provide the opportunity to launch a fresh name, especially as such interactive galleries are synonymous with science museums in the public minds. The delivery of this gallery is underway, with a provisional programme to open in Autumn 2016.

4.0 Rationalisation of the NMeM Collections storage

In addition to all of the above, as part of our Masterplan development *and* as part of a much wider strategic review of Group collections management/storage, we have been considering a rationalisation of the NMeM collections storage which aims to:

- increase the profile of and access to the collections
- provide greater opportunity for public programming and research

- improve documentation and collections care
- provide better long-term storage conditions
- save money

The proposal is that the collections will be stored in three locations:

- National Media Museum in Bradford [Insight storage/research areas; Treasures Gallery will enable greater public display with associated 'open storage']
- Science Museum in London, associated with the Media Space exhibition galleries in a new, purpose built Print Room/Research Centre, and the new Dana Centre Research Centre
- Science Museum Group's storage facility at Wroughton [Part of collections storage planning for SMG]

The majority of the collections stored in Bradford consists of photographic material – prints, negatives, on metal, glass and paper; photographic albums. There is also a significant amount of library material and photographic technology. As we move forward with the strategic vision outlined in this paper, the collections and curatorial expertise located in Bradford should clearly support the STEM vision of the Museum.

A review of the collections storage will enable wider access and clearer alignment with the broad areas of research and programming that the collections enable – the *science & technology* (remain in Bradford) and the *artistic & cultural* practices of the image (move to London). There will still be a requirement to manage the collection as a whole.

The proposal is that the Museum retains (1) The Daily Herald Archive; (2) The Kodak Museum Collection; (3) The Impressions Gallery Archive; and manages and curates the collections as archive material. The collections of photographic material held in the Kodak Collection and the Daily Herald archive are large – 100,000 items and 3mill items respectively. Managing them as traditional museum collections would require documentation to item level, which would require a considerable investment in staff to create the records.

Treating collections as archives means they will be documented to a level appropriate to the original creation of each archive. The whole collection can then be effectively documented with many fewer individual records making the documentation of and access to the collections much easier. Treating the collections as archives also means they can be managed without the need for specialist photography curatorial resources. A [redacted] to manage the Museum's archival collections across all subject areas – photography, cinematography and television. As a whole the collections can then be catalogued, and that catalogue information published online, eliminating the need for a curatorial interface between researcher and collections for initial enquiries.

The remaining Photography Collections that support the artistic and cultural practice of photography would be moved to a new Research Centre in the Science Museum in London, to support the programming and research in Media Space. This would include significant collections of photographic material such as the Royal Photographic Society; The Fox Talbot Museum Collection; the Herschel Collection and others.

The move of the material offers (and arguably necessitates) the opportunity to properly document the collections to appropriate levels and will require a significant investment in collections management to support the moves and provide greater access in the future.

A feasibility study is currently underway to understand the scope, costs and resource required for the move, documentation, collections management and new storage.