

## British Museum announces major partnership with the University of Reading

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### Key points

- Discussions to house the British Museum Archaeological Research Collection in a new facility in Wokingham Borough
- Collections from both Bloomsbury and Blythe House sites would be rehoused in the new facility
- The study collection will be more accessible for research and for loans across the country and internationally
- This partnership is the first of its kind between a national museum and a UK university to deliver benefits to the public and research

The British Museum is pleased to announce a major partnership project with the University of Reading to develop a significant new collection storage and research facility – the British Museum Archaeological Research Collection (BM\_ARC). Subject to planning permission, the British Museum and University of Reading are hoping to locate this facility next to the Thames Valley Science Park which is located within Wokingham Borough.

The facility would house a portion of the British Museum's research collection, including world-renowned archaeological collections of ancient sculpture, mosaics, archaeological assemblages and historic cast collections. Many of the objects would be moved from Blythe House in London, which is due to close in 2023. The new development would not be a second British Museum but it would be an active and integral part of the organisation, and its focus will be on global research. Study rooms would give university students, academics and members of the public access to the collection. The Museum hopes to work closely with local museums on loans and other projects.

The University of Reading is already an important research partner of the British Museum, with major projects based on the Museum's archaeological collections. This includes a Reading-led study (along with the University of Manchester) of excavated prehistoric grave goods to better explain the role of objects in the lives of people living in ancient Britain. This project will underpin new interpretation of the displays in the Museum's public gallery of Europe and the Middle East 10,000–800 BC (Room 51). The Museum has also worked with Reading on several collaborative PhD studentships. The University of Reading offers a strong range of teaching and research programmes with direct relevance to areas of the British Museum collection – from Palaeolithic prehistory to later world archaeology and history.

**Hartwig Fischer, Director of the British Museum** said 'This is a hugely exciting project for the British Museum and will be a cornerstone of the Museum's masterplan. I am delighted we are partnering with the University of Reading on the project. The Museum's study is of incomparable research value and the facility will ensure more access to the collection for study and loans, fulfilling two of the central purposes of the British Museum.'

**Sir David Bell, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Reading**, said: "We are delighted to be partnering with the British Museum to develop this important storage and research facility. The University has an impressive collection of museums - this partnership is a natural extension of

our work that will benefit not only our students and academics, but the local community and beyond.”

**John Glen, Minister for Arts, Heritage and Tourism, said:** “This is a really exciting partnership that will give researchers, academics and other institutions more access to the British Museum’s incredible Blythe House collection. Blythe House is a treasure trove of historic artefacts and we are investing £150 million to help museums create new world-class facilities to protect and preserve this unique and important collection.”

Discussions around the look and feel of the proposed development are at a very early stage and talks with officers at Wokingham Borough Council are ongoing. Subject to these discussions, the British Museum and the University will engage the community in a broader public consultation in the New Year before any planning application is submitted to Wokingham Borough Council. Should the planning application be successful it is anticipated that the facility will be completed in time to allow objects from Blythe House to be moved by the end of March 2023.

## **Notes to editors**

### **1. What decision has been made?**

The Chairman of the Trustees and the Director have confirmed that, following an extensive national selection process, the Museum will be partnering with the University of Reading on the development of the new British Museum Archaeological Research Collection (BM\_ARC). Subject to planning permission, we hope to construct a storage and research facility next to the new Thames Valley Science Park, located within Wokingham Borough. This will house and provide access to objects from the British Museum’s study collection, including many of the objects currently stored at Blythe House in London.

### **2. What was the selection process?**

The Museum’s aim was to ensure that the objects housed in the new facility are accessible for active research and loans throughout the UK and internationally. In collaboration with universities across the country, the Museum has conducted a thorough selection process over the last year to identify a suitable site. The Museum is very grateful to all involved for their help and support in reaching this outcome. The British Museum is delighted to partner with the University of Reading. The university offers a strong range of teaching and research programmes with direct relevance to areas of the collection – from Palaeolithic prehistory to later archaeology and history.

### **3. What will be stored at the new site?**

The building will house many objects primarily used for study from the Museum’s outstanding international collection. This includes world-renowned archaeological collections of ancient sculpture and mosaics, archaeological assemblages, and historic cast collections.

### **4. Will all the study collections housed in Bloomsbury move to the new facility?**

No. Some objects will continue to be stored on the Bloomsbury site.

### **5. Where will the facility be built?**

The preferred location is on land owned by the University of Reading, next to the university’s new Thames Valley Science Park development, located within Wokingham Borough. The land is not yet developed but its proximity to the university and the M4, and the local infrastructure improvements agreed as part of the Science Park, make it a logical location for this new cultural development. The Museum has been working with the university to ensure that the proposed development will be appropriate for its location, and will be applying for planning

permission in the coming months. It is the intention of the Museum and university to deliver a solution which will be well received by Wokingham Borough Council.

#### **6. What will it look like?**

The project is in the early stages and plans are still very much in development. The primary objectives of the building would be to facilitate world-class research and to deliver appropriate storage for the Museum's important study collection. Its design would focus on these aims.

#### **7. How much will it cost?**

The project is in the early stages and plans are still very much in development. The project has not yet been fully costed.

### **Further information**

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