

No 286

THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

AT A MEETING

ON 26 February 2026

AT 1000

Present

Lord Tony Hall of Birkenhead (Chair)
David Craig (online)
Mark Read CBE (online)
Shahpur Kabraji
Professor Yadvinder Malhi FRS CBE
Robert Noel
Professor Katharine Robson Brown
Dr Sarah E Thomas
Sally MacGregor
Tanuja Randery CBE
Professor Dame Jane Francis DCMG FRS

In Attendance

Dr Douglas Gurr (Director)
Helen Whitehouse (Chief Operating Officer)
Siobhán Tighe (Chief Financial Officer)
Dr Tim Littlewood (Executive Director of Science)

Beth Parry (Director of Strategy and Innovation) for item 5
Clare Laws (Head of Strategic Planning) for item 5
Adam Farrar (Director of Commercial) for item 5
Dan Phelan (Director of Communications, Digital, Marketing, Publishing) for item 5
Rich Hinton (Chief Information Officer) for item 5
Emma Woods (Director of Policy) for item 5
Dr Sarah Long (Head of Registry) for item 7
John Jackson (Head of Science Policy and Communication) for item 7

Julia Evans (Board Secretary), Molly Harrison-Edge (Development & Director's Office Project Officer), Siobhan Murphy (Executive Assistant)

Preliminary Items:

2657 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies received for absence.

2658 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REGISTER OF INTERESTS (01a)

Declarations of Interest and changes to the Register of Interests were recorded by the Board Secretary.

2659 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 NOV 2025 (01b)

The minutes of the meeting of Trustees held on 19 November 2025 were confirmed as a true record and signed off by the Chair.

2660 CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair welcomed the Board of Trustees – welcoming newly appointed Estates Trustee Sally MacGregor and notifying that this Rob Noel's last meeting.

2661 DIRECTOR'S REPORT (02a-c)

The Director (DG) gave a summary and update on the Pokémon retail partnership following opening in January 26, recent international visits with the G13 Natural History Museum group visit in Los Angeles, and their visit in January 2026 along with the Prime Minister's delegation to China.

Trustees expressed an interest and shared their support to engage with commercial audiences that have global fanbases, like Pokémon, to inspire partnerships and engage new and different audiences to NHM.

The Director also shared details of partnership developments with China which will be brought to the Board's attention as part of future Strategy Away Day.

Further updates included DiSSCo on Exhibition and Galleries. The Director also presented potential big \$100m ideas with examples of Planetary Knowledge Base, Fixing Our Broken Planet IP packages, National Education Nature Park campaign with potential view of African territories and NHM 150 campaign to share with Trustees. Trustees expressed interest and in supporting specific ideas. These includes targeting Oceans particularly and for more of these details to be fleshed out as part of the next Board meeting in May. Tanuja Randery and David Craig supported the Planetary Knowledge Base, Yadvinder Malhi on 30 x 30 ideas and Kate Robson Brown has links with Africa so can support NENP.

2662 FINANCIAL REVIEW (03a-c)

The Chief Financial Officer (ST) gave a summary for Period 9. ST explained that P11 and P12 will show how the run rate for Public Bodies Infrastructure Fund for 25/26 is lower than expected but that the Executive still expected to deliver the full allocation by year end. Below forecast spend to date on capital more broadly was mainly due to capital works being delayed into the next financial year.

2663 APPROVAL FOR BUDGET & FINANCIAL PLAN (04)

The Chief Finance Officer (ST) shared that further that PBIF funding awarded for 26/27 and 27/28 was less than anticipated over the two years and that capital cost pressures will therefore increase. The Chief Operating Officer (HW) explained that the lower fund award was unexpected, so the team is working through a re-profile of priority works with DCMS. She also mentioned that if the NHM has a successful decision from the recent Valuation Tribunal appeal hearing on its business rates, such income to be prioritised for capital works. The Budget forecast will ensure that the operating income and expenditure has the capacity to respond to any changes and ensure that there is a good reserves position to maintain capital works.

Alongside communication around cost management, behavioural change around activity with a commercial mindset and prioritisation ensuring that activity can continue within the staffing costs envelope aim to meet targets. Lessons learned from across the sector such as recent challenges counterpart museums faced were noted.

The Trustees approved the Budget for the 2026 / 27 Financial Year.

2664 ENGAGING THE WIDEST POSSIBLE AUDIENCE (05a -e)

A framer paper on Creating Advocates for the Planet was presented to the Board by the Director of Strategy and Innovation (BP) and Head of Strategic Planning (CL). The advocates opportunity metric results were the focus, setting the context for the more detailed discussions in this section. Trustees noted an interest in advocacy opportunities across multiple channels, and it was recommended that the planned work on impact evaluation; including audience diversity is brought to the Board at a later date.

These were then followed by papers and discussion by the Director of Commercial (AF), who shared of various audiences including families, European and International audiences. The challenges of physical space throughout the museum to ensure quality and engagement with audiences were also shared. This included improvements through a 'Guest experience programme' incorporating staff training, housekeeping, weather impacts and the digital versus physical experiences and the Signage and Wayfinding project was also highlighted as a solution to help audiences to navigate the building. Trustees asked about Membership and how this might be grown.

The Director of Communications, Marketing, Digital and Publishing (DP) focussed on how creating advocates through digital channels by encouraging visits to the Museum and sharing our science on social media platforms and YouTube. The website will be a focus to ensure people can plan and book a visit and support the Museum. Trustees were interested to hear about the use of apps for planning visits to help people plan their visit, measure sentiment on social media and find partners and to expand reach and engagement. Trustees were also keen to hear about any experimental or iterative opportunities for the digital experience.

The Director of Public Programmes (AB) shared an update on the Urban Nature Movement and potential for National Education Nature Park (NENP) to reach 10 million people in the UK. A roadmap for scaling NENP globally with a first pilot in Canada, taking NENP approach to Museum settings and the ambition to secure programme renewal from August 2027 was shared. Future opportunities were discussed including the Annual Trustees Dinner relationships and partnerships such as with Environmental Systems Research Institute and the Royal Horticultural Society. Trustees were also interested in SEND provisions and impact reporting particularly in improving attendance and attention within schools within its renewal strategy; and how NENP might target devolved administrations beyond England.

The Director of Policy (EW) talked about making maximum impact within a small policy team and the progress with national policy makers and engaging from a ministerial level. Within a complex political environment, developing and sharing scientific research and evidence has been an effective way to influence Data and international partnerships with science have helped priority focus such as the 30 x 30 initiative. Trustees queried on how NHM's policy team might convene further with higher education institutes and universities and other more corporate players globally.

Standing Items:

2665 MAJOR PROJECTS UPDATE (05a)

The Chief Operating Officer (HW) summarised the report on major projects and raised considerations on NHM Unlocked and updates of the build at the Thames Valley Science Park moving along at pace, and the 150 Campaign with updates on Development's work to secure funding for the future Children's and Dinosaur's Galleries.

2666 QUARTERLY COLLECTIONS REPORT AND REQUESTS FOR RETURN (07a-b)

The Board noted the Quarterly Collections Report and approved the Request for return.

Items to note:

2667 SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS (07a)

AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

Shahpur Kabraji shared from ARC on internal audit processes, estates masterplan and an update risk management policy and risk matrix and noted that the Matrix should be shared with the Board. The Chair noted updates specifically for the Audit and Risk Committee with Rob Noel stepping down and both Kate Robson Brown and David Craig joining from May 2026.

SCIENCE ADVISORY / COLLECTIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Yadvinder Malhi and Sarah Thomas shared that the joint meeting ran well. The Chair requested that this is now formally put in place and that any required updates for this are put in place. YM shared that the Committee had feedback on the Planetary Knowledge Base and exploring how AI and Data can solve some of the issues.

INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Rob Noel updated on his last committee meeting with Unlocked looking to be ahead of programme, the need to secure a financial reprofile from HM Treasury as a result, and that the sale of associated property is proceeding. Trustees also heard about progress on the re-tender of the Security contract.

2668 EVENT DATES FOR THE DIARY (08a)

Event dates for the diary for 2026 were noted.

2669 AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE BOARD MEETINGS

The rolling agenda for future meetings was noted.

2670 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Modern Slavery Statement was approved.

The Chair noted that this meeting marked the conclusion of Rob Noel's impressive tenure as a Trustee, and formally acknowledged his invaluable contributions, particularly his insightful work and guidance in relation to Estates matters and the museum's significant capital programme

The Chair thanked the Board and secretariat for their time and preparation, and the meeting ended.

2671 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

- 20 May 2026
- 2 July 2026
- 17 November 2026