

No 284

THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM

AT A MEETING

ON 2 JULY 2025

AT 1320

Present

Lord Tony Hall of Birkenhead (Chair)
Cath Caldwell (Board apprentice)
David Craig
Shahpur Kabraji
Robert Noel
Mark Read CBE
Dr Sarah E Thomas
Professor Katharine Robson Brown
Tanuja Randery CBE

In Attendance

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

Jessica Bradford (Director of Collections) for item 5
Dr Sarah Long (Head of Registry) for item 5

Rosalind Glass (Board Secretary), Ayesha Kamran (Governance Officer), Siobhan Murphy (Executive Assistant to Director and Chair)

Preliminary Items:

2629 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Professor Dame Jane Francis DCMG FRS and Professor Yadvinder Malhi FRS CBE.

2630 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REGISTER OF INTERESTS (01a)

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

2631 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 MAY 2025 (01b)

The minutes of the meeting of Trustees held on 20 May 2025 were confirmed as a true record and signed off by the Chair.

2632 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 20 MAY 2025

All matters arising were noted as completed or scheduled for a later date.

2633 CHAIR'S REPORT

The Chair Welcomed Tanuja Randery CBE to her first meeting of the Board of Trustees and reflected on recent museum matters including the opening of new exhibitions, a visit from the G13 museums group and the Annual Trustees' Dinner.

Morning tours of the Palaeontology Building and the Darwin Centre led by Tim Littlewood and Jessica Bradford were reflected upon and would be a useful primer for the substantive topic later on in the meeting.

The Chair gave an update on new trustee inductions and Rob Noel's replacement recruitment process.

2634 DIRECTOR'S REPORT (02a-b)

The Director highlighted key items in the paper, namely updates on NHM Unlocked, DiSSCo UK, AWS Summit, London Climate Action Week and G13 museums group meeting.

Pre-construction work at Thames Valley Science Park had commenced and the team had just undertaken a deep dive with the Director, COO and CFO to look at project delivery priorities as they enter this next phase of the programme. A groundbreaking ceremony would take place in September to which Trustees would be invited.

Trustees had a question on the Biodiversity Intactness Index and the exclusivity and transparency on that data set including naming rights. The question was answered and resolved. The Director thanked DC for advising the team who were working on approach to both enrich the data further and differentiate the data externally from others.

2635 FINANCIAL REVIEW (03a-b)

The Chief Financial Officer (ST) gave a summary showing results to 31 May 2025 (Period 2) for the financial year 2025-26 with comparatives to the revised budget approved by Trustees at the board meeting in May 2025. The Board of Trustees was asked to note this.

Trustees had a question on what percentage of the budget was represented by the £217k variance noted against exhibition income. This is to be answered after the meeting. Another question on Wildlife Photographer of the Year sales in comparison to the last year was answered by the Director, noting there were four competing paid offers currently. Trustees suggested a review and refresh of the exhibition to stimulate sales and sponsorship. The Director reminded all that the competition as a highly successful one against peer organisations and provided additional income through global touring. This item would be revisited at the September Away Day for Trustees (action for secretariat).

A question on the science investment fund was answered and resolved.

Items for Approval:

2635 2024/25 ANNUAL REPORTS AND ACCOUNTS (04a-f)

The Chief Financial Officer (ST) gave a summary of Annual Reports and Accounts for the Museum and its subsidiaries. Accounts had already been endorsed by the Audit and Risk Committee. The board was asked to approve the NHM Annual Report and Accounts, NHM Financial Statements for Approval, Special Funds Annual Report and Account, Benevolent Fund Annual Report and Accounts (aligned to the Trading Company).

The board was asked to note Trading Company Financial Statements as these would be signed off by directors of trading company.

ST gave thanks to the Audit and Risk Committee for their support on these items. The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee reported that the committee had spent considerable time with the Executive team and the National Audit Office going through the items. Some areas of focus in the report were more extensive than past processes.

The Chair asked Trustees for delegated authority to him and SK to sign off the annual reports and accounts on the condition that any significant changes were flagged to the Board of Trustees prior to this, although it was noted that none were expected.

The Trustees approved the delegated authority.

Trustees requested the Director to raise the valuation issue with DCMS as it delays audit and accounts every year. The Director agreed (action for Director).

The Chair thanked team for all their hard work on the accounts and thanked SK for input from the Audit and Risk Committee.

Substantive items:

2636 SECURING THE FUTURE OF OUR COLLECTIONS (05a-d)

Papers were presented by the Executive Director of Science, the Director of Collections and the Head of Registry. They gave an overview of the collection, major programmes transforming the collection, and wider strategic themes.

The Board was asked to reflect on what they saw on the tour, how the collection is managed, and were asked to consider the ambition, scale and pace of activity happening with the collection in coming years to understand how the museum is addressing big questions about the future of its collection.

The team responded to questions regarding collections care and security. Trustees were assured that the Museum has a robust approach to security of the collections, which is regularly discussed with a view to continual improvement and learning from best practice in the sector. Collections security, along with other risks to collections, including fire and flood, are reviewed quarterly by the Audit and Risk Committee.

The presentation promoted other questions and comments on subjects including digital watermarking existence in the DiSSCo UK project, the critical path and vision of the new Director of Collections, how we define and articulate the impact of collections for a range of user groups (including scientific research communities) and KPIs for what success looks like through Unlocked. All questions were answered and resolved.

Trustees gave the team various advice on how to go forward relating to AI, innovation platforms, culture change and leadership.

In relation to molecular collections and biobanking, the group discussed a strategy for coordinated national collecting and the Director shared his view on the need for a more global approach.

Trustees were interested to understand the museum's current collecting strategy which was explained and will be the topic of a joint Science and Collections Advisory Committee in the autumn

Quarterly Collections Report

The Head of Registry summarised the quarterly collections report.

Standing Items:

2637 MAJOR PROJECTS UPDATE (06)

The Chief Operating Officer summarised the report on major projects and gave updates on key milestones including closedown of the Urban Nature Project.

Items to note:

2638 SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS (07a-d)

INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE (07a-b)

Rob Noel reported that the committee had not met since the last Trustee meeting.

COLLECTIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE (07c)

Sarah Thomas updated the Board on the committee who had last met in June with a substantive item on Library and Archives. The next meeting will be joined with the Science Advisory Committee.

Sarah Thomas advised bringing the same item to the Board of Trustees at a future date (action for Secretariat).

AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE (7d)

Shahpur Kabraji updated the board on internal audit function and plan for the next three years and was confident this new system would provide assurance to trustees on all audit and risk.

The recent meeting featured an update from the Innovation Unit and the Chair suggested they present this to a future Trustee meeting (action for Secretariat).

SCIENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Executive Director of Science reported that the committee had not met since the last Trustee meeting.

2639 EVENT DATES FOR THE DIARY (08)

Event dates for the diary were noted.

2640 AGENDA ITEMS FOR FUTURE BOARD MEETINGS

The rolling agenda for future meetings was noted.

2641 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair announced the changeover of Secretariat for the next meeting. Julia Evans would be covering Rosalind Glass for a year of maternity leave.

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

2642 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

- 16 September 2025 (Strategy Day)
- 18 November 2025