1: Introduction

1.1 The Natural History Museum has commissioned a Grounds Development Feasibility Study (GFS) from consultants Arup Associates and is in the process of commissioning further work from an architectural historian into the evolution of Waterhouse’s designs for the site. The GFS has been subject to informal consultation with the Royal Borough and local interests. However, the document has been met critically. There has also been concern expressed by the Planning Applications Committee about the number of temporary events and structures on the eastern section of the grounds. This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) has been prepared to set out the Council’s views on how the grounds should be used in the future and to assist the museum in developing its own strategy. The recent issuing of PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment and the soon to be published English Heritage Guidance on Temporary Structures makes the preparation of this document particularly timely.
2: The Site and Its Significance

2.1 It is not necessary here to go into detail about the architectural and historic significance of the museum. That is well covered in the museum’s Conservation Plan which was approved in June 2003. Sufficient to say that its significance stems from its grade I listing and its key location in the Queens Gate Conservation Area. It is also in an Area of Metropolitan Importance and of major cultural significance.

2.2 The grounds effectively divide themselves into five main areas: the area in front of the Waterhouse building (the East and West Grounds); the Wildlife Garden; the area next to the Darwin Buildings (the Darwin Garden); the area in front of the Palaeontology Building (the Palaeontology Grounds); and a small area adjoining Museum Lane. The attached map shows these areas.

2.3 These guidelines deal mainly with the areas in front of the Waterhouse and Palaeontology Buildings. No major change is envisaged to the Wildlife Garden or the areas next to Museum Lane. However, the amenity value of the latter areas is likely to be improved following the completion of the works to Exhibition Road and the provision of benches might be considered. The landscaped area next to the Darwin Centre has been recently completed and it is understood that no major changes or activity is proposed. However, the area has been identified by the museum as the location for a new Tsunami Memorial and is therefore included in these guidelines.

East and West Grounds - Significance

2.4 The area in front of the Waterhouse building, as the setting of the grade I listed building, is clearly the area with most heritage significance (Area 1 on the attached map). In many respects, this area retains much of the character of Waterhouse’s original concept including the strong sense of symmetry around the central axis which stretches from the museum to the Albert Memorial. The original railings and gates form the boundary with Cromwell Road. The line of plane trees (although planted later) help to define this screen, but also mark the start of the intended green setting for the museum. Beyond this, the curved ramps and entrance steps have not changed apart from the loss of the earlier gas lamps. The parallel paths and central lawns appear to be quite an accurate reflection of the original layout, though it is possible that the current grassed areas were originally planted with flowers and shrubs. A photograph from 1896 shows the western section of the garden less formalised than the east, with its lawn flowing continuously into an informal area which is now the Wildlife Garden. This was consistent with the original internal layout of the museum, which had the ‘living’ exhibits in the West Wing and the extinct exhibits in the East Wing. Its fundamental character of greenness and openness is still there today. It is this history and the extent to which the current layout is consistent with Waterhouse’s original design which is being researched at the present time and will be used to inform future proposals. Some aspects clearly detract from the museum’s setting, such as the tarmac paths, the use of the area in front of the ramp for car parking (now ceased) and some of the miscellaneous objects such as the petrified tree. The garden is in concept, at once formal and dignified, but at the same time a soft landscaped space.

The Palaeontology Grounds - Significance

2.5 Waterhouse’s original plans show this, (Area 4 on the attached map) as a relatively formal garden layout with paths and borders. Subsequently, the construction of the Exhibition Road foot tunnel with its link to the garden and much later, the 1970s Palaeontology Building have given this area quite a different character. The ramp to the garden area, the stepped entrance to the foot tunnel and the backdrop of the Palaeontology Building give it a rather less formal and more fragmented appearance. However, its openness is important in views to the Waterhouse building from the corner of Cromwell Road and Exhibition Road and the pedestrian route to the museum from the east.
3: Aims

3.1 The aims of the SPD are set out below. They recognise the importance of the museum as an institution of international importance, and its mission: ‘to maintain and develop its collections and use them to promote the discovery, understanding, responsible use and enjoyment of the natural world’. They also recognise that the museum’s Ten Year Vision (2001) contains a legitimate aspiration to increase revenue generation. In the consideration of any relevant applications, a local planning authority has to weigh any harm to the setting of a listed building against any wider public benefits. The aims of these guidelines are as follows:

- To protect the character, appearance and setting of the listed building;
- To improve access to the museum for all;
- To accept activities which reinforce the museum’s core activities, particularly those which are of benefit to the local community;
- To protect residential amenity.
4: Policy and Guidelines

4.1 The relevant local policies are contained in the saved policies of the UDP and the Core Strategy as well as the London Plan. UDP Policy CD10 protects important views and vistas around the South Kensington Museums Area, and policy CD11 sets out ways in which the precinct character of the Museums Area may be preserved and enhanced. Policy CL1 of the Core Strategy requires new development to respect local context and character, Policy CL4 protects the special interest and setting of listed buildings and Policy CL5 protects parks, gardens, open spaces and waterways. The need to scale back the use of open space for events is highlighted in Chapter 12 on South Kensington. In addition, Queen’s Gate Conservation Area Proposals Statement seeks improvements to the museum’s frontage (pp28).

4.2 The London Plan identifies the area as a Strategic Cultural Area within the Central Activities Zone. It considers the enhancement of the South Kensington Museums Area to be especially important.

4.3 Government policy and guidance is contained in PPS5 and the accompanying Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide. The most relevant policies relating to proposals affecting listed buildings are HE7, HE9 and HE10 which set out the considerations in dealing with applications which affect them and their settings. In addition Paragraph 80 of the Planning Practice Guide sets out design considerations whilst Paragraphs 113-124 deal in detail with setting.

4.4 English Heritage’s Guidance on Temporary Structures for Events is also relevant. The guidance lists a number of issues including: location; physical impact; visual impact; the setting of listed buildings; design; duration and season.

4.5 Further details of these policy and guidance issues are contained in Appendix 1.
5: Planning Guidelines

The East and West Grounds

5.1 The views of the Waterhouse building and its setting are key aspects of its value as a listed building. This section of the grounds should be free of structures and should be improved to enhance the setting of the listed building. At the same time, the opportunity should be taken to provide obvious and step free access close to the main entrance. This may be achieved by providing a new entrance to the building at the rear of the curved ramps. The opportunity should be taken to restore the Waterhouse landscaping as far as is possible and to improve the materials and appearance of the paths.

Guideline 1

5.2 Permanent or temporary structures will not be permitted in front of the Waterhouse building, between the front of the building and Exhibition Road.

Guideline 2

5.3 The restoration of the gardens in accordance with the Waterhouse concept will be encouraged as far as possible, informed by the latest research. Among other things this will include improving surfacing to the pathways, making them suitable for all to use, and reinstating the gas lamps on the curved ramps.

Guideline 3

5.4 The provision of an obvious well designed step free access to the main entrance will be encouraged. The area between the curved ramps will otherwise be kept clear of parking and structures to maximise its potential for pedestrian circulation and gathering.

The Palaeontology Grounds

5.5 Following the implementation of the improvements to Exhibition Road, the eastern approach to the museum is likely to become more popular. It is important that this route is designed to a high standard and in a dignified manner that befits the approach to one of the Royal Borough’s finest listed buildings. In the longer term, the aim should be to provide good step-free access from the foot tunnel and street level.

5.6 This area, in front of the Palaeontology Building, is appropriate for some temporary activities and structures at restricted times of the year. The landscaping might be adapted to reflect this use of the space, whilst maintaining clear views and vistas of the Waterhouse building. It might also be possible to make use of the currently rather dead space under the arcade of the Palaeontology Building for outdoor catering.

Guideline 4

5.7 Temporary activities and structures may be allowed in front of the Palaeontology Building, providing that:

- The formal pedestrian route and open views and vistas to the Waterhouse building are maintained
- Individual activities and structures are not in place for more than four months of the year and the total time in any one year for temporary structures is not more than eight months including erection and dismantling.
- The site coverage by buildings is limited to 50% and in the main does not extend further forward than the front building line of the Waterhouse Building.
- The height of the structures is generally no higher than the string course above the basement floor of the Waterhouse building. Some increase in height might be acceptable if the structure is well set back.
The design quality is high and does not detract from the grade I listed building. The timber ‘garden shed’ type structures used in the past are not considered to be appropriate.

A satisfactory management plan has been provided. (Its contents are set out in Appendix 2)

5.8 The Council will also take into account the nature of the use and its relationship to the core activities of the museum.

Guideline 5

5.9 Encouragement will be given to the provision of new landscaping in this area which reinforces the formal pedestrian route to the main entrance to the museum, is consistent with its use, is of high design quality and enhances the setting of the listed building. Hard landscaping might predominate if constructed of high quality traditional materials. Permanent landscaping should be designed to accommodate the anticipated range of temporary uses thereby avoiding the need for significant landscape remodelling and replanting every time such uses are set up or dismantled. Service points for water and electricity should be unobtrusively designed in.

Guideline 6

5.10 Encouragement will be given to the provision of good step free access to the grounds from street level and the foot tunnel.

Guideline 7

5.11 The use of the arcade beneath the Palaeontology Building for café/restaurant use may be allowed, together with step free access to the facilities.

The Darwin Garden

Guideline 8

5.12 The Darwin Garden is currently a quiet space and used only informally by visitors. Any new uses or structures should respect this character. Proposals are being developed for a Tsunami memorial. It is important the siting, size and detailed design respect the planned landscape of this area as well as the setting of the Waterhouse Building and the listed lodge.
6: Planning Procedures

6.1 The majority of temporary structures and events are likely to require planning permission. These applications should be made well in advance of the event concerned to allow for local consultation and the resolution of any technical issues. The Council's pre-application procedure may be beneficial for the larger, longer-term events. An application for listed building consent will be required if the proposal is attached to or alters the listed building. In each case a Design and Access Statement will be required as well as a Management Plan.
7: Natural History Museum Map

Natural History Museum Grounds Development Framework Planning Guidelines

1. East and West Grounds
2. Wildlife Garden
3. Darwin Garden
4. Palaeontology Grounds
5. Museum Lane

Note: Base map does not show the Darwin Centre
Appendix 1: Planning Policy and Guidance

RBKC Policy and Guidance

UDP

Policy CD10 – ‘To protect important views and vistas in and around the South Kensington Museums Area’. These are listed in paragraph 4.2.15.

Policy CD11 – sets out ways in which the precinct character of the South Kensington Museums Area should be preserved. Paragraphs 4.2.16 and 4.2.17 provide more detail.

Core Strategy

Chapter 12 South Kensington - sets out the Council’s vision for the area. Paragraph 12.3.3 recognises the need to more effectively manage the area around the Natural History Museum. Policy CP12 emphasises the need for good quality public open spaces.

Policy CL1 sets out requirements for development of high quality throughout the Royal Borough.

Policy CL4 requires development to protect listed buildings and their settings.

Queens Gate Conservation Area Proposals Statement

Although adopted in 1989, much of its guidance and advice is still relevant, including recognition of the inadequacies of the open space in front of the museum on page 28.

Regional Guidance

The London Plan

The London Plan includes the South Kensington Museums Area within the Central Activities Zone, and Map 5G1 identifies it as having ‘mixed uses with a strong arts, cultural or entertainment character’. Enhancement of the South Kensington Museum complex is especially importance (paragraph 5.185).

Government Policy and Guidance

PPS5 – Planning for the Historic Environment

This is recently published Government Policy and Guidance which should be read alongside the Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide.

The relevant policies are HE7, HE9 and HE10 in the PPS which are backed up by guidance under the same headings in the Planning Practice Guide.

English Heritage Guidance

Temporary Structures in Historic Places

This guidance will be published in the near future, but the draft is being used to give guidance on the contents of a management plan below.
Appendix 2: Contents of Management Plan

Management plans should cover the following aspects of temporary development and should take into account the period for setting up and dismantling the structures:

- Construction Management, including works of reinstatement
- Transport assessment
- Noise assessment