

UK Museum COP Report: Executive Summary

Tate Modern, 31st October 2023

1. Introduction

On 31st October 2023 the National Museum Directors' Council (NMDC) brought together an extraordinary meeting of its members with other museum colleagues, sector bodies and funders for a 'UK Museum COP' at Tate Modern to tackle the climate and biodiversity crises.

Taking the COP (Conference of the Parties) model, the event was the culmination of work by a series of subgroups each engaged in progressing a critical issue: Ethics, Heritage Buildings, Planning and Adaptation, Scope 3 Challenges, Workforce and Skills, Funding, and Collections. The subgroups sought engagement from invited attendees from museums, sector bodies and funders, who were asked to actively participate by discussing and then voting in real time on previously agreed questions to build consensus on various issues.

This Executive Summary gives a short overview of the COP event and the actions and recommendations for each subgroup theme. A longer report is also available providing a full account of the day including the presentations, panel discussions and results of audience voting and feedback.

2. Ethics

Nick Merriman, Director of the Horniman Museum and Gardens and Chair of UK Museum COP also chaired the subgroup looking at the ethical issues museums face in responding to the climate and biodiversity crises. The subgroup recommended a statement to COP setting out the sector's role in relation to the twin crises of climate and biodiversity. Attendees were asked to respond and interrogate the statement before calling a vote to agree it. After discussing and agreeing some amendments 95% of attendees endorsed the statement:

Statement from the Ethics subgroup, endorsed by UK Museum COP

In looking after collections for future generations, museums are amongst a small group of institutions of the long-term, mandated to take a perspective beyond the short-term cycles of politics and economics. Given this, leaders of UK museums feel a responsibility to speak out about the current climate and biodiversity crises and call upon UK politicians and businesses to accelerate action to mitigate these crises before it is too late. We are already around or beyond crucial tipping points: global temperatures are higher than they have ever been since humans emerged as a species, and extinctions are occurring at around a thousand times the normal rate. There is an existential threat to the world we have become accustomed to.

Many museums have collections relating to the Earth's five previous mass extinction events, and we are now in the midst of the sixth, the Anthropocene. UK museum leaders feel they have an ethical obligation to take action to alleviate that damage. Museums will:

- Use relevant collections, programmes, and exhibitions to engage audiences with the climate crisis and inspire them to take positive action.*
- Introduce more sustainable collections management including using disposal more actively.*
- Develop and implement decarbonisation plans which include relaxing carbon-hungry environmental parameters.*

- Undertake measures to mitigate the impacts of extreme weather and adapt to new challenges.
- Increase biodiversity in our green spaces.

Like all organisations across the country, museums need assistance with decarbonisation, mitigation, and adaptation. We call upon business, funders, current and future governments to facilitate this, and to maintain and deliver on commitments to achieve net zero carbon emissions and protect our natural environment.

Action 1

[Ethics subgroup] Make the minor amendments to the statement as discussed.

[NMDC staff] Make the statement public and share with the press (note the above is the final agreed version with amendments).

3. Heritage Buildings, Planning and Adaptation

Hedley Swain, CEO of Brighton and Hove Museums, chaired the Heritage subgroup which presented a statement and set of recommendations and actions to address the urgency of the challenge faced by museums and heritage.

Attendees were asked to discuss and vote on two areas:

- Planning and legislation – the group suggested that a rebalancing needs to take place, as currently not enough importance is placed on climate resilience as heritage protection takes precedence over other concerns.
- Government funding – whether all new government funding should be targeted towards making our buildings and operations carbon neutral and protecting them against the effects of climate change.

Voting on both issues was split, and although there was broad agreement on the emphasis on climate adaptation as urgent and being as important as (and as a means to) heritage protection, many felt that further development was needed for the statement.

The subgroup also presented a set of actions, which have been delineated into actions for museums and actions for enacting funding and legislation changes:

Action 2

[Heritage subgroup] Discuss feedback on statement from COP.

Action 3

[Heritage subgroup] Take forward actions in two categories:

1. Actions for museums:
 - A quantification and understanding of funding needs.
 - An understanding of the cost-benefits of investment.
 - An end to duplication, all moving forward together.
 - Everything undertaken shared with public.
 - And none of this at the expense of biodiversity.
2. Collective calls for funding and legislation change:
 - A change in legislation and planning guidance now.
 - New public funds now.
 - New specialist staff in strategic organisations.
 - Central coordination of all activity through a new executive role.
 - A single reporting structure.

4. Decarbonisation Case Studies

Andrew Wylie and Laia Carpena from engineering consultancy firm Buro Happold presented a series of case studies on how to decarbonise museum buildings and estates. Taking 6 sample museums of different types and ages, the study looked at a range of measures across three categories, 'quick wins', 'maintenance', and 'capital projects' (or low, medium, high difficulty/cost) to reduce emissions.

Buro Happold are now working with Flint + Partners to establish the costs of the different improvement measures at each case study museum, to give the sector a better idea of the scale of the challenge and costs associated.

Buro Happold also conducted a sector analysis using data from Display Energy Certificates (DEC) which show the performance of publicly occupied buildings using a scale A-G. The data from 251 museum sites showed that 40% of museum buildings have an average or below average operational rating and emit some 129,000 tonnes of CO₂ a year, equivalent to 21,500 households.

Using the DEC to look at potential CO₂ savings, the study showed by moving only the 19 museums in the bottom band G to band C would save 1,200 tonnes of CO₂, equivalent to a 70% energy saving. If all museum venues scoring D or below were to improve their energy rating to a C, they would save 2,600 tonnes of CO₂, equivalent to 433 households. There is potential for all buildings to make improvements, and for every move up a band there is a potential saving of around 10%.

Action 4

[Buro Happold] Produce a full report with completed decarbonisation case studies and costings, to include recommendations for further discussion.

5. Funders

A subgroup of public sector and independent funders chaired by Caroline Mason, CEO of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, were asked to work alongside the COP subgroups to come together to discuss and identify what their role should be in supporting the museum sector.

Representing the group on the day, Sufina Ahmed, Director of the John Ellerman Foundation, noted that the funders' discussions covered issues including and beyond the COP topics, such as land management for biodiversity gains, the value of considering nature and climate together, the need to consider people (both staff and volunteers) and the audiences museums serve as well collections and curation.

The funders posed two questions for attendees to inform future conversations and steer potential supporting programmes:

- "How might funders better support and encourage environmentally responsible museums?"
- "What are the biggest gaps in current funding and barriers to action for museums on environmental sustainability and climate issues across areas including buildings, operations and public engagement?"

Feedback was collated and shared with the funders' group to support their ongoing conversations.

Action 5

[Funders subgroup] Meet again to discuss feedback from COP and agree potential areas for further discussion/action.

6. Scope 3 Challenges

The Scope 3 subgroup chaired by Maggie Appleton, CEO of the RAF Museum, discussed the challenge of getting to grips with Scope 3 emissions, the proliferation of toolkits and guidance and the fact there is no 'one size fits all' approach. Whatever their resources, they agreed all museums can start on the journey to reducing emissions via some simple measures.

Purchasing was highlighted as a key route to reduce Scope 3 emissions and training was emphasised as particularly important with the need for whole organisation commitment. The subgroup proposed that all museums should have a sustainability plan which the majority of the audience agreed with.

Voting identified some of the biggest challenges centred around visitor travel, purchasing and understanding supply chains, data measurement and reporting. The lack of standards and cross-sector baselines were also seen as barriers. Others highlighted the issue of staff expertise and the cost of change.

The majority of the audience agreed they would commit to taking no domestic flights, and to measuring and reducing travel whilst acknowledging flexibility is needed for some business-critical reasons and issues such as location. Visitor travel was highlighted as an ongoing concern, though many felt efforts should focus on influencing visitor behaviour rather than attempting to measure and report this.

As a result of their discussions, the subgroup has developed a Ten Point Plan for reducing Scope 3 which would be finessed and shared with the sector.

Action 6

[Scope 3 subgroup] *Continue to meet to work on further ideas for potential action and to share learning and best practice.*

Scope 3 Challenges Subgroup Recommendation

The subgroup recommends that NMDC works with other sector bodies to develop signposting to existing resources for museums, including clear guidance on the most relevant resources for different types of organisations.

7. Workforce and Skills

The subgroup, chaired by Andrew Mackay, Director of Tullie, presented a range of recommendations to increase knowledge and capacity in the sector focussed around five key areas: Carbon Literacy Training, Formal training, Mentoring, Recruitment, and Learning and Development.

The subgroup highlighted the necessity for Carbon Literacy Training to be rolled out more widely and strategically, backed by secure funding. They also discussed advocacy to formal training providers and the need for mentoring, integration of sustainability into HR practices and the roll out of a cross-sector training programme to pool resources.

In polling almost half of attendees identified cost and time as the most significant barriers to ensuring the workforce is upskilled. Co-ordinating, collaboration and taking collective action was highlighted as the main route in tackling workforce and skills challenges.

Workforce Subgroup Recommendations

Carbon Literacy

- All NMDC members and all COP attendees should undertake Carbon Literacy Training.
- Within the next 12 months, all UK museums should ensure Carbon Literacy Training is undertaken by:
 - two board members;
 - 50% of senior leadership teams;
 - and if possible 50% of the whole workforce.

- There should be more funding for Carbon Literacy Training to enable it to be rolled out across the whole UK museum sector.

Formal Training

- NMDC and sector partners to collectively lobby postgraduate training and apprenticeship providers for environmental and sustainability issues to be included in current training offers.

Mentoring

- Development of a cross-sector mentoring scheme to share knowledge and expertise across the museum sector.

Recruitment

- All museums should adapt their recruitment policies and processes to incorporate sustainable behaviours and actions.

Learning and Development

- All museums should embed sustainability into their Learning and Development programmes.
- NMDC and sector partners to develop a cross-sector open programme of sustainability-focussed training in the 2024/25 financial year.

Action 7

[Workforce subgroup] *Meet again to discuss feedback from UK Museum COP and agree how to take forward the Workforce subgroup recommendations.*

8. Collections

NMDC's previous conference in 2022 identified environmental conditions as one of the key barriers to moving to a more sustainable footing. As management and care of collections are so integral to everything that museums do, the issue was identified as needing a joint sector approach.

NMDC therefore convened a subgroup of the main UK sector organisations looking at the issue and welcomed presentations from:

- Arts Council England on the newly published Government Indemnity Scheme (GIS) review.
- Institute of Conservation (ICON) on the public commitment from conservators to move to a risk-based approach when caring for cultural heritage.
- Touring Exhibitions Group (TEG) on training for environmental decision making for touring exhibitions and forthcoming research on sustainable exhibition design.
- UK Registrars Group (UKRG) on promotion and sharing of good practice for lending and borrowing, sharing practice internationally and the development of a loans carbon calculator to be integrated with an existing carbon calculator.
- Gallery Climate Coalition (GCC) on the roll out of a new and improved set of tools applicable for museums, a Sustainable Shipping Campaign and an updated and expanded pilot programme from partners Ki Culture to trial more flexible environmental conditions.
- The NMDC Chair who updated on the newly agreed Bizot Protocol refresh and the move to a 'green option first' approach for the management of collections, loans and touring. Attendees overwhelmingly voted to support the adoption of the Green Protocol and for NMDC to endorse it.

Action 8

[NMDC members] *Formally endorse the Refreshed Bizot Green Protocol.*

Action 9

[NMDC staff] *Continue to convene the group and champion the work of sector bodies working towards reducing the impact of collections.*

9. Global Call to Action on Climate

UK Museum COP attendees voted to endorse and be signatory to a Global Call to put cultural heritage, arts and creative sectors at the heart of climate action which had been tabled by Julie's Bicycle, the leaders of the campaign. The call asks the national governments who are parties to the UN Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Paris Agreement to adopt a 'Joint Work on Culture and Climate Action' decision (JWD) at COP 27 in the United Arab Emirates with the hope to trigger a global consultation on culture-led initiatives and solutions, and culminate in the adoption of a new UN work plan on culture, heritage, and climate action at COP29 or COP30.

Action 10

[NMDC staff] *Report the agreement to sign Julie's Bicycle Global Call to Action and NMDC added as a signatory.*

10. Next Steps

The day closed with a recap of the sessions and key decisions.

Action 11**[NMDC members and COP attendees]**

- *Including wider sector, to be encouraged to sign up to Julie's Bicycle Global Call to Action.*
- *All attendees as individuals to take recommendations and actions agreed today to implement in their organisations and connect with others at COP who can help.*

Additional actions for NMDC to pursue:

- *Progress the actions and recommendations of COP in collaboration with sector colleagues and NMDC members and develop mechanisms for reporting and holding the sector to account on progress.*
- *Consider further issues to take away for future discussion: environmental costs of digital, adaptation and resilience to climate change beyond mitigation, biodiversity (in more focus) and public engagement.*
- *Work with museums and sector bodies on collections issues.*
- *To work with the sector to further develop a set of asks for an incoming government.*