UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
ZOLOGY MUSEUM RECOGNITION FUND PROJECT BOARD

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 23 NOVEMBER 2012

Present: Neil Curtis (Convener), David Burslem, Jenny Downes, Marie Fish, Martyn Gorman, Duncan Heddle, Melia Knecht, Mark Paterson, Jonathan Pettitt, Anna Shortland, Nicole Stahl.

Apologies for absence were received Leigh Bjorkvoll, George Johnson, Alan Knox, Les Noble, Carrie Watt.

1. PROJECT OUTLINE
Neil Curtis outlined the project, noting that it was the result of a successful application for £53,012 to the Recognition Capital Fund administered by Museums Galleries Scotland. Applications to this fund were restricted to those museum collections which are Recognised as being of national significance; a status that is held by the entire museum collections of the University.

There have been five previous Recognition Fund projects which have resulted in significant improvements to the documentation of collections, particularly the Herbarium and Zoology. The refurbishment of 17 High Street, Old Aberdeen to create King’s Museum was also supported by a Recognition Capital Fund grant.

The need for improvements to the Zoology Museum had been noted by the Museum Accreditation scheme and has also been investigated by a visitor surveys conducted by an Aberdeen Intern. This survey had highlighted the need for better signage and interpretation, but had also shown that most visitors appreciated the taxonomic displays.

2. PROJECT BOARD/ADVISORY PANEL
While the project application had proposed a separate Project Board and Advisory Panel, it was agreed to hold joint meetings approximately once a month. There would also be individual and small group meetings relating to specific aspects of the project.

Members would be: Leigh Bjorkvoll (Lecturer in Education), David Burslem (Deputy Head of School, School of Biological Sciences), Marie Fish (Education Officer, Natural History Centre), Martyn Gorman (former Honorary Curator of the Zoology Museum), Duncan Heddle (Honorary Lecturer, School of Biological Sciences), George Johnson (Clerk of Works), Alan Knox (Emeritus Head of Museum Collections), Les Noble (Honorary Curator of the Zoology Museum), Mark Paterson (Curator, Cruikshank Botanic Gardens), Jonathan Pettitt (Reader, School of Medical Sciences), Anna Shortland (Curator – Learning and Access), Nicole Stahl (Museum Conservator), Carrie Watt (Public Affairs Manager, RSPB).

Core museum staff working on the project would be Neil Curtis (Head of Museums and Project Director), Jenny Downes (Curator - Science & Exhibitions and Project Manager), Melia Knecht (Curatorial Assistant - Collections).

3. FOYER EXHIBITION
The Zoology Building foyer is to be tidied and made into a more welcoming space, without compromising its function as the entrance to an academic building. An exhibition is proposed, titled ‘Aberdeen Naturalists’, with three strands:
   a. A history of the museum, introducing the various historical figures behind the creation and growth of the natural history collections and museum.
b. An introduction to current research, mainly that in the School of Biological Science (SBS) and Oceanlab.

c. Highlighting opportunities for public involvement in natural history, including how to become involved in local projects, activities, and opportunities to become involved (e.g. Natural History Centre; RSPB, SWT and SOC events and lectures; Friends of Cruikshank Gardens). It was agreed that strong links should be made between the museum, Natural History Centre and Cruikshank Botanic, with other opportunities for collaboration noted by the Board including RSPB bird banding, collaboration with the Botanic Garden, NESBREC, James Hutton Institute, Scottish Natural Heritage Cairngorms National Park.

With only £670 allocated to improvements in the foyer, this will focus on re-using existing cases with the addition of a partition wall to increase space for text and images. The footprint for displays is restricted to the existing ‘white spaces’ as outlined by floor tiles. The main area will be where the sabre-toothed cat is, but will also incorporate the area under the whale bones on the wall (where a display about Struthers could re-interpret them as a link to displays on evolutionary biology in the Lower Gallery). Display space is also required for Natural History Centre activities/events.

4. MAIN GALLERY EXHIBIT

The Upper Gallery will be tidied up and de-cluttered of cases, but the main focus of the project will be in the Lower Gallery. This gallery is laid out in a taxonomic fashion pretty much as it was when it was completed in the 70s. The project aims to leave the museum much as it is, except that the case layout will be tidied up with little organisational change.

The space available in the front of the gallery will become an introductory display about evolutionary biology. The display cases with outdated taxonomic nomenclature can be used to highlight areas where taxonomic order has changed and the reasons for the changes. This will be the major component of the entire capital project, with a budget of £38,000, which will primarily be spent on new display cases. The Board noted that there used to be tables and chairs, which were used by staff and students for teaching purposes.

5. COLLECTIONS CARE IMPROVEMENTS

The primary area for care improvements will be in lighting of the galleries and display cases. Current light levels in the Lower Gallery far exceed acceptable levels of lux and UV exposure for museum objects (recent lux and UV readings in multiple locations in the Lower Gallery were in excess of 2,000 lumens and 500 respectively, whereas acceptable levels for Natural History specimens are maximum 200 LUX and 70) and have already caused significant damage. The Recognition Capital Project has £11,000 to spend in this area, which will only enable limited improvements as new light is very expensive (e.g. art fibre optics can run £1,000 per display case). In addition, many of the tubes are no longer made and lighting in the current display cases is very difficult to access. This aspect of the project will focus primarily on the Lower Gallery and discussions are ongoing with industry specialists for advice and costings.

The project will also explore the possibility of removing the student computers from the Upper Gallery as workstations require a minimum of 500 lumens per workstation, which contributes to high light levels in the galleries. They also take up space useful for display or teaching purposes, promote an unwelcoming environment for other visitors, prevent the Natural history centre form using the Upper Gallery, encourage eating and drinking, and so encourage insect pests, like carpet beetle. Recent
changes by DIT have reduced the number of PCs from over 30 down to 20, but the new desks are larger than those formerly in place. While it was agreed that the computers would be better out of the gallery, there is a need to offer students an alternative place to study or use computers.

6. SIGNAGE AND MINOR WORKS
Signage will be improved as part of the project, with the intention of co-ordinating these improvements with similar work for the Botanic Garden and Natural History Centre. There is £1,200 allocated to this aspect of the project. Work will include exterior signage on the building and doors, Vinyl ‘footprints’ on the floors and stairs guiding people to Botanic Garden, Museum and Natural History Centre.

Opportunities for combined branding of the Museum, Botanic Garden and Natural History Centre and possibilities of new names were discussed. Suggestions included re-introducing the ‘Natural History Museum’ name. Alternative options will be investigated and will involve wider consultation with visitors.

It was noted that Estates have offered to bring forward work in the museum to coordinate with project work. This will include repainting the entire gallery and re-flooring over existing vinyl with carpet tiles. The proposed colour scheme will follow the precedent of other gallery and museum refurbishment projects and go with a dusky, light green and white theme.

7. WORK PLAN
The Recognition Capital Project has a very tight schedule, so it will be important that project works coordinate with other building users and University events. Some works will be disruptive and not compatible with, for example exam time, and it would not be suitable for the museum to be closed when festival or open day events are scheduled, while it is also important that work relating to events does not create extra work. Martin Cowie has provided the Project Team with a schedule of events within the Zoology Building, which includes exam schedules, etc., Marie Fish has shared the Natural History Centre diary with Melia Knecht and Jenny Downes is looking into setting up a shared calendar for the Project.

15 DATES OF MEETINGS

It was noted that the next meetings were scheduled for:

- Friday, 18 January 2013 at 4pm  Zoology Building room 316
- Tuesday, 12 February 2013 at 2pm  Zoology Building room 316
- Thursday, 21 March 2013 at 2pm  venue TBC
- Tuesday, 23 April 2013 at 3pm  Zoology Building room 316

MK/NC
30.11.12