



# Exhibition Design Brief

Heart of Cornwall & Nature Gallery - Royal Institution of Cornwall

January 2024

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## 1. Introduction

Royal Cornwall Museum has an exciting opportunity to create two significant long-term exhibition redisplays in the Cornish history and natural history galleries.

The **Heart of Cornwall Gallery** will be located in the main gallery space (see front cover image) and relate the story of Cornwall through thematic displays that feed into the main narrative themes of the museum (appendix 1).

The transformation to the Heart of Cornwall Gallery will create an impressive space that becomes the go-to in discovering the story of Cornwall. It will provide the '**WOW**' factor on entering the museum, being atmospheric and visually striking.

The museum is uniquely placed to tell the story of Cornwall using our social history, archaeology, photography, arts and science collections. The exhibition will inspire, deepen understanding and engage interest in the unique narrative of Cornish heritage and culture.

The exhibition will showcase the most important objects in our collections that relate to our history, culture and identity.



Using our natural history collections of birds, mammals and insects, the **Nature Gallery** will explore the unique natural environment of Cornwall, distinctive biodiversity and current issues concerning the climate emergency, its local and global impacts. This will be located in the Bonython Gallery space where our existing natural history exhibition is on show.

The exhibition will encourage people to engage with our natural world, and to think and behave differently, to encourage nature to thrive and build a better future for our planet. We will be working with Cornwall Wildlife Trust in developing themes and storytelling.



The Nature Gallery will appeal to family audiences and include playful interactive content. However, it must balance this with zoned content for more adult audiences. It must have visual impact and inspire imaginations, creating excellent visitor experience.



Both exhibitions must have broad appeal catering for a wide range of general museum visitors with interpretation built on robust research and support school learning activities. Spaces must be welcoming and both physically and intellectually accessible. We would like to include accessible seating and space for small groups to gather, such as school groups and guided tours.

The exhibitions will take a multi-sensory approach, including physical interactives and digital learning. Lighting and decoration will need to be carefully considered, particularly in the main gallery to provide flexibility to create a welcoming space for all and allow for events and hire opportunities (consideration will need to be made for event M&E provision).

We are keen to employ a more sustainable way of exhibition production and consider sustainability and longevity in materials, equipment and fixtures, minimise waste, and reduce our carbon footprint. We are keen to work with designers and contractors that share these same values around environmental responsibility.

## 2. Background

In January 2020, the museum closed to the public for eight months to start a process of radical change and to carry out emergency maintenance work. The museum leadership team changed, with new Board members, a new co-leadership model with the Executive and Artistic directors bringing in a new vision, operating model, and five-year plan.

The museum hit further challenges in 2022 when a sudden halt in grant funding meant an uncertain future for the museum. This moment has passed, and we have bridge funding secured and capital grant funding confirmed to invest in the development of the museum. Our focus is on transforming our museum; its sustainability, the physical spaces, the visitor experience, and audience engagement.

By 2026 the Royal Cornwall Museum will have become a compelling visitor destination, a vibrant, thriving multi-arts community hub. It will attract over 60,000 visitors a year and all its activities will be underpinned by a robust, agile, and sustainable operating model.



### 3. About The Royal Institution of Cornwall

The Royal Institution of Cornwall is a community-focussed museum, art gallery and archive which houses nine galleries and holds approximately 1,000,000 objects. The RIC is a membership run charity.

Royal Cornwall Museum cares for many of the most significant objects and archives from Cornwall's history, natural environment and art, that collectively hold the identity of this small nation, providing insight into Cornish life, culture, and global connections. We use our public spaces, collections, and creative programme to make positive change for our communities.

Royal Cornwall Museum is at a pivotal time in its 200-year history. We are embarking on a phased transformation project that will build sustainability to become more financially resilient and secure our future by transforming the organisation into an exciting multi-arts space for our communities.



#### Our Vision

Cornwall is unique. The seas and the landscapes, its language and its minerals, as well as countless generations of Cornish people who have lived and worked across this land, have all combined across the generations to make Cornwall a place like no other.

At the very heart of Cornwall and its cultural life, the Royal Cornwall Museum is a centre of exploration and learning. Using the eclectic collections of Cornish culture, art, antiquities, archaeology, science, and natural history we take people on a journey from deep underground, up into the sky, around the world and way back in time. In doing this, we use our collections to help our communities look forward together.

Our plan is to transform the museum into an exciting multi-arts community space, where people come together to share and enjoy creative activities, where they can be inspired to take part and enjoy life-enriching cultural activities.

The role of museums is changing, and our vision and values reflect this change while recognising that the founding principles that were established back in 1818 still hold true today. The RIC's activities, approach and decision-making will always be driven by its charitable objectives, vision, and values.

## Charitable Objectives

To advance the education of the public through the study and knowledge of literature, natural sciences, archaeology, history, ethnology, geology and the fine and applied arts.

## Our Values

Shared Vision, Purpose Driven  
Collaboration and Imagination  
Open and Inclusive  
Environmentally Responsible

## 2022-26 Strategic Priorities

1. Achieve financial sustainability.
2. Build audiences & engagement.
3. Secure capital Investment to repair and improve our buildings and our visitor offer.
4. Improve care and management of our collections.
5. Develop our capacity.
6. Environmental sustainability – net zero carbon by 2030.

## 4. Project Summary

Gallery Size: Main Gallery: approx.. 271m<sup>2</sup> Nature Gallery: 100m<sup>2</sup>  
Duration: Long-term exhibition, expected lifespan 10-15 years  
Schedule: The full project will be complete by end of December 2024



## 5. Project Context

This project is part of a phased transformation of the Royal Cornwall Museum that will create a sustainable visitor destination that plays a significant part in Cornwall's cultural offer and creates a vibrant multi-arts community asset in the heart of Truro.

The project's first phase is being funded through the Cornwall Council managed Shared Prosperity Fund <https://ciosgoodgrowth.com/> and forms part of phase 3 of the transformation project.

Summary of the transformation project phases:

	Outline	Funding sources	Complete by
Phase 1	Redevelop the mineral gallery and create a digital lab	Truro Town Deal - funding secured	July 2024
Phase 2	Secure the building fabric; essential repairs to the roof, rainwater goods, rendering repairs and timber replacement.	DCMS Arts Council England MEND - funding secured	May 2024
Phase 3	Complete the redisplay of the ground floor permanent galleries; the Heart of Cornwall Gallery, the Nature Gallery and exterior landscape and garden improvements	Cornwall Council Good Growth SPF - funding secured	March 2026
Phase 4	Develop the upper floor galleries, improve physical access from the street front, create a new access core and enhance commercial areas.	Funding to be sought	March 2027



## 6. Project Vision

We want to create inspiring spaces where the significance of Cornish stories and our collections can be shared and celebrated in a way that engages many audiences. These will inspire creative thinking, help build connections, and promote curiosity and learning.

Environmental responsibility is important to us. We want the design to consider and reflect sustainability in approach, materials and delivery. Antique display cases can be upgraded and reused. We want the designs to celebrate the grade II listed historic building and highlight architectural features where possible. Each space in our building has its own individual ambience and we want to enhance this and ensure we retain a visitor experience that is authentic and specific to each gallery space.

The **Heart of Cornwall Gallery** needs to create a sense of awe and wonder on entering the museum. This is the most impressive space in the building, and we want it to work as a major gallery telling a nationally significant story, and as a flexible space for venue hire. We would like digital interpretation to enhance understanding by providing storytelling elements that will engage wider audiences along with layered interpretation for diverse audiences.

We need to improve the acoustics in this gallery, which can echo and reverberate. There is a high elongated domed ceiling and imperial stairs rising to first floor balcony. The decorative scheme for this space needs to consider, but not include a design that can be successfully carried into the second floor and roof area (to be completed at a later stage of the project). The gallery has a black and white terrazzo floor.



Obsolete radiant panels have been disguised with black and white photographs (as above). The project needs to include removal of these panels and pipework. Similar work has recently been completed on the balcony level and details of project cost can be supplied.

The gallery is lit with LED track lighting and requires more flexible lighting to create changing ambience for different events.

The **Nature Gallery** sits to the side of the main gallery and incorporates a walk through to the lift and WCs. Consideration needs to be made in how best to use the space to incorporate storage for cloaks and event furniture. The opposite side of the main gallery houses the doors to the mineral gallery (currently in redevelopment). The design scheme needs to consider visitor flow and signage.



The Nature Gallery needs to work for family audiences, providing a flexible space where toddlers and young children of all ages are safe and engaged with hands on interactives, toys and books alongside digital storytelling. The space should contain zones to allow for small groups to gather and supporting narratives for a wider age range of audiences. The gallery will feel warm and inviting and include soft furnishings and places to sit comfortably.

The project will be realised through a collaborative process with the Royal Cornwall Museum team, stakeholders including Cornwall Wildlife Trust, creatives and consultants working on parallel projects; Headland Design in interpretation planning and Soul Farm Studio on brand development. The design of the space will align with our emerging brand and support our interpretation strategy.

## 7. Audiences

The wider transition project sets out the journey we are on to make Royal Cornwall Museum a valued community hub and thriving visitor attraction in the heart of Cornwall. It is our aim to grow visitors from 30,000 in 2022 to 60,000 visitors in 2026 and engage with more diverse people. This project is a major part of achieving this ambition, alongside our programme of exhibitions and events.

The Heart of Cornwall Gallery will be the main feature of the museum, attracting new audiences of local people who may not have visited the museum for some years, alongside day visitors and tourists. We want both exhibitions to be appealing to diverse audiences, including local people, families, school groups and tourists. The galleries need to be accessible, supporting support people with multi-sensory needs and providing space for wheelchair and pushchair access.



## 8. Content

The exhibitions will be drawn from the museum's collections and content developed in partnership with other institutions and partners.

The **Heart of Cornwall Gallery** will be object rich, drawing on diverse collections to relate Cornish history from early history to present day. This includes archaeology, social history, art, decorative art, science and photography. We also have archive material that could be used for reprographics. We will be working with experts in Cornish heritage a culture to develop the narrative storylines.

The **Nature Gallery** will utilise a greater amount of interactive content alongside natural history collections of taxidermy, entomology and herbaria (which must be reproduced for long-term display). The gallery will focus on Cornwall's unique biodiversity, our landscape and climate change. We want to provide visitors with engaging content that helps us make changes towards living more sustainably. We will be working with Cornwall Wildlife Trust in developing interpretative themes.

The exhibitions can use a combination of new and re-used exhibition cases, digital and physical interpretation, interactive sand games, individual object labels and more detailed information provided digitally or in easily updateable formats.



## 9. Interpretation Aims

We are in the process of developing specific interpretative themes for each gallery and further detail will be available as the project progresses.

The exhibitions will:

1. Welcome all visitors, inspire engagement and encourage people to share their own stories, thoughts, and prompt discussion.
2. Create atmospheric and visually striking spaces, enhancing the historic building, and create vibrant spaces that promote connection and inspires the imagination.
3. Tell clear yet richly textured narratives, drawing out stories to support dialogue and shared understanding.
4. Support a range of visitors and access needs, and support a diverse range of people, creating a sense of inclusion.
5. Take a multisensory approach and use the juxtaposition of objects, stories, AV, artworks etc., allowing multiple ways in and many points of connection.
6. Take an environmentally sustainable approach to design and delivery that lasts throughout their duration.



## 9. Design Approach

The exhibition will reflect the values of the Royal Institution of Cornwall. We are looking for a conscious, sustainable design. Designers will need to take a collaborative and iterative approach, working with the RIC team in response to stakeholder consultation, the interpretation strategy and brand review.

Accessibility and inclusion are at the heart of everything we do. The exhibitions need to be well-lit, with clear and legible text, fully wheelchair accessible, have multi-sensory elements, support neuro-diverse visitors and have seating points with arm rests.

The galleries have a functional LED light track, but internal case lighting needs to be improved. Security of objects and environmental conditions must be considered with the RIC team.

Designers will be expected to take on the role of Principal Designer for the project, should be able to demonstrate their capability to dispense that responsibility and should cost for the time it will take. Depending on project schedule, there may be times when other contractors are working in the building and we will need to negotiate CDM hierarchies.





## 10. The Brief in brief

An experienced Interior / Exhibition Design team is required for the design and build of this project.

### Deliverables

- A detailed design specification developed collaboratively with the RIC team and in response to stakeholder consultation, brand design and the interpretation strategy.
- Delivery of the exhibition design scheme in response to the brief, creating improved interpretation including physical and digital interactives
- Responsible removal of unwanted fixtures and furniture within gallery spaces, including radiant panels, temporary dividing screens and obsolete interactives
- Digital interpretation and content development
- Space decoration and floor treatment
- Exhibition and flexible event lighting
- Acoustic treatment for the main gallery
- Any related M&E work

### Tender requirements

- A succinct methodology and outline plan/programme
- Outline of the consultant / project team experience, including where appropriate subcontracting teams
- Sketch concept setting out initial thoughts aligned to the expectations of this brief to be built upon if successfully appointed.
- Fixed price project fee including daily rate breakdown and expenses.
- Two references from similar project / organisations



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## Appendix 1

### Narrative Themes

These will thread through each gallery connecting the stories told in each gallery. Visitors will find aspects of each of these in each gallery.

1. Cornish identity is multi-faceted, based on a distinct culture that continues today. The language that formed historically, informed by culture, is having a revival. Cornwall's place at the edge of the island of Great Britain gives the Cornish identity a great sense of place which continues to be expressed through the arts, sciences and industry.
2. The mining industry has long led Cornish people to far-flung places across the world. People of the Cornish diaspora often still identify strongly with the land and culture of their ancestors, with places known as 'little Cornwall' in Australia, Mexico and the USA.
3. Cornwall's landscape was changed forever by mining, quarrying, and farming – first for survival, and later irreparably scarred by industry. The landscape also informed what and how people worked in and with it, with its hills and valleys and the coast on three sides. The landscape of today was shaped by people, while industry was shaped by the landscape, both generating wealth, communities and culture.
4. Cornwall's deep history is more closely linked to Brittany, Wales and Ireland than anywhere in England, reflected in its archaeology, placenames, language and folklore. It is steeped in myths and legends, with its own unique tales, and remains a place that people associate with spirituality and the unknown.
5. Landscapes of Cornwall are rich and home to a unique and diverse wildlife. The peninsula, surrounded by the sea, is a jigsaw of cliffs, woodlands, lakes, rivers moors, peaks, towns and villages. Throughout history, these landscapes have inspired artists, and today, can also help us understand how the climate is changing.
6. The World Cultures collections enable people to experience history and identity from global perspectives, encouraging everyone to celebrate diversity, recognise similarities and interrogate Cornwall's role in Empire and colonialism.
7. Geographically and culturally, Cornwall was always distant from England and its ruling powers. Cornish people have long fought to protect the distinct characteristics of their culture, identity, values and beliefs, establishing a tradition of rebellion, non-conformism and a strong sense of pride of place.

