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Mitsui Fudosan celebrates British Library extension groundbreaking with special ceremony on site

Mitsui Fudosan – one of Japan's largest listed property companies – has held a special ceremony on the site of the British Library, London, to mark the formal start of work to deliver a 700,000 sq ft extension to the existing Library building.

The ceremony – which incorporated a series of Shinto rituals to prepare the site for construction work and to ask the *'kami'* or guardian spirits of the land for good luck and a safe delivery of the project – followed a time-honoured Japanese tradition with a priest or *'saikan'* officiating.

The event – on 21 September – was held in the presence of around one hundred guests including representatives from local community groups in the Somers Town area, Camden Council and business organisations based in the King's Cross Knowledge Quarter.

The proposals for the extension – due to be completed in 2032 – will create transformational new public spaces for the British Library alongside new, globally significant capacity for commercial science, innovation and knowledge-based industries.

The development is being delivered by SMBL, a company wholly owned by Mitsui Fudosan UK, and its partner the British Library with Stanhope PLC as development manager. The construction manager is Mace Construct. Last year, Mitsui Fudosan Ltd confirmed a £1.1 billion funding package for the extension.

Yugo Ono, Executive Managing Officer and Chief Operating Officer, International Division, Mitsui Fudosan Corporation Ltd, said: "Our development commitment to the British Library extension represents what we believe to be one of the largest single real estate investments into London by a Japanese company to date. We already have several large-scale laboratory and innovation district developments in the USA and in Japan. Our understanding and experience of this sector has grown substantially over the past decade.

"The Mitsui Fudosan Group's long-term vision, "& INNOVATION 2030," recognises overseas business as one of its core operations. It identifies 'Deepening and Evolving Overseas Business' as a key initiative. We believe that expanding investments into new asset classes and entering new business areas in collaboration with outstanding local partners is crucial going forward. By embedding ourselves locally, we have been steadily building trust-based relationships with partners and other stakeholders. I believe that these relationships are in the DNA of Mitsui Fudosan.

"In addition, we believe that libraries, which play a crucial role in academia, research, and education, have strong synergies with lab offices, which serve as research & development hubs. This project is particularly attractive to companies seeking collaboration with The Alan Turing Institute, a world-renowned AI research centre and The Francis Crick Institute, the largest life sciences research facility in Europe.

"The British Library development will form part of a larger global strategy for the sector, which provides enhanced opportunities to create economic and social value in the long term as well as urban regeneration at scale. I would like to thank the British Library for its generous help and support over many years in getting this project over the line and look forward to working with all those involved in facilitating and supporting its delivery in the years ahead."

Once completed, the proposal – designed by international architectural practice RSHP and engineers Arup – will create an expanded national Library in London exhibitions, learning programmes, business support, events and more. Offering a significantly expanded Library by adding around 100,000 sq ft (9,290 sq m) of new public space, connected to the community and open to the world, the proposal will feature:

- New exhibition galleries, doubling the size of the Library's existing gallery space and enabling greater interaction with the national collection.
- Expanded and more diverse spaces for the Library's well-established business support services, helping entrepreneurs to start and scale up new businesses and new maker spaces to help users create and pilot new innovative products.
- A brand-new learning centre providing enhanced educational experiences for visitors of all ages, including an expanded offer for families.
- An expanded multi-use foyer space, open to all, with event spaces available for local businesses and the community, with additional new entrances to welcome everyone to come in and explore.

Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, said: "This extension of the world-renowned British Library is fantastic news for London. The £1.1 billion investment will further cement our reputation as a global leader for innovative research and a thriving cultural hub. The expansion in London's Knowledge Quarter will also kick-start new job growth, contribute towards affordable housing and support the regeneration of the area with new green spaces for all Londoners to enjoy. This is a hugely exciting milestone for London and we look forward to working with the British Library and Mitsui Fudosan on this extension project as we build a better, fairer, more prosperous city for everyone."

And **Sir Keir Starmer, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom 2024-2026, said:** "I welcome the British Library extension as an exceptional development which builds on the Library's presence as a major hub for research located at the heart of London's Knowledge Quarter. As well as delivering a greatly expanded Library with connected public spaces, the proposal creates a new centre for commercial science, technology and life sciences aimed at supporting the advancement of science and innovation by forging new connections and facilitating new partnerships.

"It is great to see the commitment of one of Japan's leading businesses, Mitsui Fudosan, to such a significant long-term investment in the UK and I wish the company – as well as the British Library – every success in the future as work to deliver the extension starts to move forward."

The proposals will also create a new centre for commercial science, data and life sciences covering approximately 600,000 sq ft aimed at supporting the advancement of science and innovation by forging new connections and facilitating new partnerships between the Library's existing collection, expert staff and institutions in the area including the Francis Crick Institute, the Alan Turing Institute and other organisations in and around the King's Cross Knowledge Quarter as well as across the UK and globally. In addition, the proposals will provide a wide range of benefits and opportunity for the local community, including:

- A £23 million contribution towards affordable housing in the area.
- More opportunities for skills and career development and jobs, particularly for people living locally and Camden's young people.
- Access to affordable workspaces.
- Improvements to the public realm including new access routes connecting Somers Town and St Pancras.
- A new community garden on Ossulston Street co-designed and managed by local people and additional Library entrances on Midland Road and Ossulston Street.

The scheme delivers a significant contribution to future transport infrastructure in the area, creating a major new shaft and safeguarding space for future CR2 infrastructure.

The groundbreaking ceremony (*'Ji chin sai'),* incorporated a groundbreaking ritual (*'Ji chin no gi')* in which participants use a spade to break the ground three times yelling *'Eih',* an old custom to draw the attention of the guardian spirit of the land, while showing respect to the earth. It also included the *'Tamagushi houten'* in which participants dedicate an evergreen sprig to express harmony with nature.

Takeshi Iwama, Chief Executive of Mitsui Fudosan UK, said: "We are proud to be involved in such a significant and exceptional project for London and the UK, and a development which will help to facilitate the expansion of one of the UK's most important cultural institutions, the British Library. Groundbreaking is always a key moment to be celebrated in the life of any project, but it is especially meaningful for this scheme which has been a decade in the making. We are confident that our proposal will encourage some of the world's most ambitious and successful life sciences companies to invest in the UK by the early 2030s. We also look forward to working with local community organisations in Camden and businesses across the Knowledge Quarter – as well as further afield – to ensure that the benefits from this high-profile development are experienced equally at the local level as they are nationally and internationally. As work on this project moves ahead, we will continue to remain committed to the British Library extension and all our other investments in London as we recognise the importance of the UK as a key global investment location."

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