

Press release

Bayeux, Friday 2nd February 2024

What will the new Bayeux Tapestry Museum look like? **Presentation of sketches of the future museum**

Under the direction of the Town of Bayeux, in close collaboration with the French State, the Normandy Region and the Department of Calvados, the project to redeploy the Bayeux Tapestry Museum, which has been housed in the Grand Seminary for forty years, entered a new phase in early 2024, with the presentation of the designs for the future museum to the public. The next aim is its opening in 2027 to mark the millennium of the birth of William the Conqueror.

"In terms of economic and cultural influence, this is the most complex and ambitious project (€38 million) ever undertaken by the Town of Bayeux." **Patrick Gomont, Mayor of Bayeux**

For several months, the British architecture practice RSHP, winner of the design competition with an international, multi-disciplinary team, has been working tirelessly in collaboration with the project partners to develop a high-quality response to the various issues of the preventive conservation and enhancement of the artwork, the impact on the urban environment and the time schedule.

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Protecting the Bayeux Tapestry in the heart of the town

The future Bayeux Tapestry Museum will remain at the heart of the town, combining ancient and contemporary in two large architectural ensembles. Within this 11,000 m² urban area, a new extension will be built next to the current Grand Séminaire (17th century), which will be completely renovated.

"This cultural and historical lung had to remain close to the Cathedral, to continue to unravel the thread of its history and to meet the challenges of our tourism strategies." **Loïc Jamin, Bayeux Deputy Mayor in charge of Museums, Tourism and the Promotion of Bayeux's Heritage**

The new building will house the Tapestry, which will now be displayed on an inclined support more than 70 metres long, to meet the conservation requirements arising from diagnostics on the material condition of this extremely fragile textile, which is almost 1,000 years old.

As since 1983, the Bayeux Tapestry will be conserved in a hermetically sealed room that will protect it from variations in light, climate and atmospheric pollution. A window along the length of this controlled conservation area will also serve as a showcase for the public. The support on which the work is presented will be tilted towards this opening, allowing visitors to appreciate the monumentality of the narration, which is as long as the distance between the pillars of the Eiffel Tower!

"During periods when the museum is closed to the public, in the low season, the work's display stand could be moved inside the premises, turning it into a genuine laboratory. Photographs can be taken, monitoring and studies carried out, as well as the programme for an ambitious restoration campaign overseen by the French State, the artwork's owner, which should stabilise the damages to the embroidered canvas." **Antoine Verney, Head Curator of Bayeux Museums**

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Three times, three views of the Bayeux Tapestry

The management of visitor flows and hospitality (the Bayeux Tapestry Museum welcomed 423,000 visitors in 2023) will also be greatly improved through this project, with the creation of spaces that are more in line with the expectations of today's public: a convivial area, cloakrooms, special rooms for school groups, a study room, an auditorium, a temporary exhibition room, and more. Particular attention will be paid to accessibility for disabled visitors, with specially adapted museography and, above all, a new entrance via the main courtyard, which has been redesigned to provide access for all.

The Bayeux Tapestry, to which the museum is entirely dedicated, will be at the heart of the exhibition space, which will be doubled in size with the new building. Thanks to ingenious construction of spaces on two levels, visitors will be able to discover the embroidery from different angles and backgrounds, supported by comprehensive displays.

The first look is intended to be a visual shock for visitors, who will gradually discover the work overlooking the exhibition gallery via a 180° view. As they move towards the beginning of the Bayeux Tapestry, equipped with their audio guide, visitors will then enjoy an intimate relationship with the embroidered canvas, which tells the story of the conquest of England in the 11th century by William, Duke of Normandy.

Visitors will be able to continue their exploration by entering the interpretation areas on the second level, while maintaining visual contact with the original work below. This new tour will allow visitors to deepen their experience, immersing themselves in the medieval world, and their knowledge – thanks to the results of recent scientific research.

PRACTICAL INFO: Sketches of the future setting for the Bayeux Tapestry will be on display in the chapel, located in the courtyard of the current museum. This information area dedicated to the project is open to the public during opening hours.

Key stages in the timetable

The shared objective is to complete the project with a view to opening the new Bayeux Tapestry Museum in 2027, to mark the millennium of the birth of William the Conqueror. To meet this deadline, the current museum will have to be closed to the public after the 2025 summer season. For tourism professionals and economic players, this means that only the year 2026 will be fully impacted by the absence of the Bayeux Tapestry.

Before the museum is closed to the public, archaeological excavations will be scheduled throughout the area affected by the project. While the museum is being built, the Bayeux Tapestry will be kept in a storage area specifically designed for its conservation. The removal of the tapestry from its current display case and its conditioning will naturally be carried out in close collaboration with the services of the French State, owner of the artwork, in order to ensure the preservation of one of the most precious heritage objects of the 11th century, classified as a Historic Monument and listed in the UNESCO's Memory of the World register.

The new Bayeux Tapestry Museum designed by a British architectural practice

RSHP is an award-winning, 180-strong architectural practice, operating globally. The practice's architecture responds to social, environmental and economic challenges alike, shaping the way people engage with place and, in turn, the planet. RSHP's design approach is rooted in thoughtfulness, problem-solving and ingenuity, always with adaptability in mind. RSHP is currently working on projects on 5 continents amongst which the Montparnasse masterplan in Paris, an extension to the British Library in London, UK and 5 new metro stations in Melbourne, Australia.

"We are absolutely thrilled to have been selected. It's both a privilege, and a responsibility, to have been offered the opportunity to design the museum that will house this unique, fragile, emblematic object. As a British practice with a long history of working in France, there's poetry in being able to contribute to a project that symbolizes the deep connections between our two countries, renewing these bonds and helping the next generations in their rediscovery of the tapestry, itself a unique embodiment of this shared past." **Stephen Barrett, Partner, RSHP.**

The design team includes:

RSHP (Lead) – Lead architect
Lympia Architecture – Heritage architect
Bassinnet Turquin Paysage – Landscape architect
FL&Co – Museography/Conservation
Atelier Brückner – Exhibition design, Graphics and Signage
Create – Multimedia and Audiovisual design
Reffet – Lighting design
Ingérop – Structural, Mechanical and Electrical engineering
VPEAS – Cost consultants
Kahle acoustics – Acoustics

The new Bayeux Tapestry Museum project partners:

