

Museums Worcestershire Collections Management Policy

Museums Worcestershire oversees the acquisition and management of the museum collections of Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council on behalf of the two local authorities.

This policy outlines the approach and framework to develop and care for these collections to ensure the people of Worcestershire today and for future generations continue to access and understand their culture and heritage.

A full review of the policy will take place every five years or on the occasion of any change of governance or significant facilities.

Policy adopted by the Joint Museums Committee on: xxx 2015

Policy due for interim review: November 2020

Museums Worcestershire Statement of Purpose

We aim to enrich the lives of people from Worcestershire and beyond, today and for future generations.

We want to inspire them to deepen their knowledge of the City and County and make sense of the world.

We will do this by preserving and interpreting the museum collections and sites; sharing our passion for the unique art, artefacts and stories that have shaped the identity of Worcestershire and its county town for over 2000 years.

Museums Worcestershire roles are to:

- Enable shared experiences, discovery and interaction at the County Museum at Hartlebury Castle, The Commandery, Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum, Museum on the Move and the Collections Centre.
- Safeguard the museum collections of Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council, maintaining national standards of care.
- Enrich the cultural heritage and future of Worcestershire and beyond.
- Expand perspectives and opportunities by supporting other museums and organisations in Worcestershire and beyond.

Aims of the Collections Management Policy

This policy provides guidance for Museums Worcestershire staff and its advisors. It sets out how the collections will be managed and developed over the upcoming years to ensure that they support the purpose of Museums Worcestershire. It builds on the Acquisition & Disposal Policies to provide a professional and practical structure for collections management.

Stewardship of the museum collections is a responsibility on behalf of the people of Worcestershire and an investment of public resources; a planned and balanced approach to collection development and management is essential.

Collections Development

Worcestershire has a quintessentially English cultural and natural heritage. Its landscape of gentle hills, strong rivers, productive fields, towns and villages has been developed through 800 million years of geological changes and more than 2000 years of Worcestershire people. The strategic importance of the county's position along with its people's skills have produced strengths that are often small in focus but international in recognition – from royal hunting grounds to Worcestershire Sauce to the glove industry

to apple cultivars. These stories and the associated artefacts are what the museum collections aim to preserve for future generations to understand and learn from.

The two collections of Worcester City and Worcestershire County Councils are mostly complementary, having been developed with consideration of the other for fifty years. Collecting in Worcester City started in 1833 with the Natural History Society, whereas the Worcestershire County collections began in the mid 1960s following the acquisition of the Tickenhill Collection (which, unlike the rest of the collection, is held in a separate charitable trust).

The City collections reflect the county town, with principally urban social history and archaeology collections alongside natural history and fine art collections reflecting the landscape of Worcestershire as a whole. Particular strengths are the glove and gloving industry collections. The County collections are focussed on rural life with strong collections of gypsy caravans, costume and the applied art of the Bromsgrove Guild.

Both collections should be accessible both to researchers and the general public both in store and in interpreted displays. Access and use are key considerations for the development of both collections. The formation of the joint museums service engineered increased exchange of artefacts between sites and wider opportunities for access.

The two collections continue to be developed in parallel. Curatorial judgements following the criteria of the two Collection Development Policies are made at quarterly meetings to appropriately place new acquisitions. Except in extraordinary situations, transfers will not be made between the collections.

There are areas of Worcestershire's heritage which neither collection is developing and these are reviewed and identified in the Collection Development Policies.

Worcestershire has a well developed independent museum network, supported by Museums Worcestershire, and collecting in some specialist areas such as Worcester Porcelain and the Kidderminster Carpet Industry is led by these museum trusts.

Rationalisation is an important curatorial tool and the joint management of the collections more easily enables identification of duplication within the collections. Staff time is allocated each year to review specific areas of the two collections. Archaeology excavations that were not rationalised on site and duplicated domestic and agricultural social history collections have potential for review. Any disposal recommendations are researched and discussed by the curatorial team before submission for approval by the appropriate council.

Worcestershire County and Worcester City Councils individually approve their Collection Development Policies.

Worcestershire County Council Museum Collection Development Policy adopted xxx2015.

Worcester City Council Museum Collection Development Policy adopted xxx 2015.

Collections Research

Artefacts need the stories of their use and significance to fully preserve and convey their cultural value. Museums Worcestershire seeks to record the information and experiences related to all the objects it manages and this underpins curatorial considerations of acquisition and disposal.

Several areas of the collections form significant primary resources holding stories about human skills and knowledge that still have much untapped potential for analysis and understanding. Examples are the gypsy caravans, the founding natural history collections, the archives of glove making and the contemporary and historical fine art landscapes. Research time is set aside each year as part of the exhibition and display planning to work with other partners and increase the recorded information and analysis about the collections and to make that accessible both to academic researchers and the general public.

The Commandery holds a unique place in the national and international story of seventeenth century religious and political debate. A research panel and staff structure has been put in place to take the study of that period further and make it more widely accessible.

Collections Documentation

Documentation is as essential part of making the collections accessible and budget and staff time are allocated each year towards achieving a professional level based on the UK museum documentation standard SPECTRUM.

The two collections of Worcester City and Worcestershire County Councils are documented in parallel, maintaining the marking and labelling practices of each collection. It is particularly important that the benefits of easier shared access and increased display opportunities do not cause the collections to become mixed up. A joint procedure covering display location documentation is in place to prevent this.

The County collections are fully documented, whereas the City collections have a considerable documentation backlog. Action to resolve the backlog is laid out in the City Collection Backlog Plan and resources are allocated each year to this work which makes significant use of volunteers.

Collections Care and Conservation

Appropriate storage, handling and, when required, conservation ensure that the collections continue to be accessible to the people of Worcestershire and beyond. Budget and staff time are allocated each year towards achieving a professional level based on exceeding the minimum standard in *Benchmarks in Collections Care for Museums, Libraries and Archives* and on raising the *Fast Forward* benchmark score.

With many artefacts, a balance must be reached to enable access today and preservation for the future. Curatorial judgements are made about loans, displays,

educational activities and storage methods on an object-by-object basis but with an overarching presumption that access should be increased wherever possible.

Specialist expert advice is sought whenever collections require active intervention or conservation. Use is made of professional networks for informal advice and recommendations.

The number of objects requiring active conservation is larger than resources available and additional funding is sought through grant applications and public appeals. Prioritisation of spend is based on a triage judgement of damage and is planned alongside the exhibition and display programmes. Museums Worcestershire will display items requiring conservation in their damaged state if to do so will not further increase the damage, but these will always be accompanied by an explanation of the issue for the public. Active conservation work is commissioned from professional conservators on the *Conservation Register* either to train inhouse staff and volunteers or to undertake specialised work.