

Report to: Joint Museums Committee, 15th June 2023

Report of: Senior Curator

Subject: COLLECTIONS UPDATE

1. Recommendation

That the Joint Committee

- 1.1 note the successful application to Arts Council England for the community co-curated Museum Voices Project;**
- 1.2 approve the recommended disposal of the objects listed in paragraph 3.4, and delegate disposal decisions until April 2025 on objects damaged beyond repair or containing hazardous materials to the Museums Manager in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of this committee; and**
- 1.3 approves the reviewed Worcester City and Worcestershire County Museum Collection Development Policies for the period 2023-2028.**

2 Background

COMMUNITY COLLECTIONS AND DISPLAY

- 2.1 Community-focussed collections work has largely been concentrated in externally funded research and outreach projects over recent years. These include:
 - The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation-funded *Glove Affair* project has utilised the City's glove collection to work with groups and volunteers focussed on loneliness and isolation, with looked after children, and with Afghan and Ukrainian refugees.
 - The John Ellerman Foundation-funded *Vardo* project seeks to engage and consult with the Gypsy Roma & Traveller communities to develop the contextual archive supporting County's collection.
 - Central Government Cultural Recovery funding has funded research into the City's world cultures collection, engagement with the Worcester Mela festival, and research and display of collections that resonate with the LGBTQ+ community.
 - The Art Fund funded *Canaletto* and *Hokusai Great Wave* projects have encouraged the development of relationships with, and resources for, blind and partially sighted people within our communities.
- 2.2 The museum collections are a rich resource for projects that develop the museum sites and build strong relationships with local communities. As set out in Museums Worcestershire's strategic plan, the service continues to seek external funding for collections-based projects.

LONG-TERM LOANS AND COLLECTIONS RATIONALISATION

- 2.3 A review in 2020, funded by Arts Council England Cultural Recovery Funding, identified long term loans in store which could be returned to their owners. In June 2022 this committee approved the use of £9000 from museum reserves to fund a member of staff to return long term loans, rationalise appropriate collection objects through ethical disposal and the continuity of community-focussed collections work.
- 2.4 Disposal of museum objects is considered within the framework of the Worcester City and Worcestershire County Museum Disposals Procedures, adopted by this committee in 2015, which define that objects will be considered suitable for disposal if they satisfy one of four criteria.
- Object damaged beyond repair
 - Object containing hazardous materials
 - Objects that were previously over collected
 - Abandoned loan or donation

Each object considered for disposal must then be subject to a significance matrix and considered low significance if they satisfy two or more criteria. Objects that satisfy one of the four entry criteria and are of low significance will be recommended by the Collections Panel, made up of officers with curatorial expertise, for disposal and then the final decision on disposing of objects lies with members.

COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

- 2.5 Worcester City and Worcestershire County Collections Development Policies 2015-2020 were adopted by this committee in 2015 and extended until 2023 due to covid in 2021.
- 2.6 Collections Development Policies provide guidance for the service on all aspects of acquisition and disposal. They are written with reference to Museums Association and sector guidance and form an integral part of policies required for Museum Accreditation, the sector's national standard of good practice.

3 Information

COMMUNITY COLLECTIONS

- 3.1 An application to Arts Council England for £79,500 for the Museum Voices Project has been successful. The grant will fund a two-year long project at Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum to develop a display co-curated with community groups in order to better represent the City's community in the galleries. The grant will fund upgrades to the activity space and associated programming. Methodologies will also be developed to help plan towards future display and exhibitions. The city and county policies will be reviewed to ensure gaps in the collection are identified and planned for, aiming for representation of the wider community in future collecting.
- 3.2 The John Ellerman Foundation-funded Vardo Project has been extended by one year until March 31st, 2025, due to an underspend as a result of the temporary closure of the Transport Gallery at Worcestershire County Museum. The extra year will allow more time for community consultation, recording memories and developing a contextualising archive and collection to support the Vardo collection.

An exhibition is planned for Autumn/Winter 2024 at Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum for which funding has been discussed with local foundations.

3.3 LONG-TERM LOANS

3.4 A Collections Assistant was recruited and began work on collections rationalisation and return of long-term loans in April 2023. The following items have been assessed as suitable for disposal and of low significance. The officers' Collections Panel recommended them for disposal on 22.5.23.

Object	Accession number	Associated Collection	Criteria for disposal
Bottle fragments	1976.257 1976.258C	City	Object damaged beyond repair
Tewkesbury Flier fragments	None	City	Object damaged beyond repair
Iron tyres	None	County	Objects that were previously over collected
12 boxes of nails	None	County	Objects that were previously over collected
Seed drill	None	City	Object damaged beyond repair Objects that were previously over collected
Unidentifiable wooden object	None	County	Object damaged beyond repair
Chair	None	City	Object damaged beyond repair
Possible tailgate from cart or dray	None	County	Object damaged beyond repair
WWII respirator in can	None	City	Object containing hazardous materials
Tin box of tines for agricultural lawnmower	None	City	Object damaged beyond repair
WWII respirator	None	City	Object containing hazardous materials
Unidentifiable metalwork	None	County	Object damaged beyond repair
Taxidermied deer head	None	City	Object damaged beyond repair

3.5 Further objects will be reviewed over the next two years, with further lists of similar objects being considered for disposal through the same procedure.

COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

3.6 Both Worcester City and Worcestershire County Collections Development Policies and have been reviewed for the period 2023-2027, **Appendices 1 and 2** refer. The main changes in focus lie in the acknowledgement of the city and county's nationally significant collections identified as the county's collection of Gypsy Vardo and associated archive, the County's Georgian costume collection and the City's gloving collection. The updated policies reflect this importance to collect from a wider geographical area and note that applications for designation as a nationally important collection are planned for the Vardo and gloving collections within the lifetime of the new policy.

The updated policies also reflect the community outreach work undertaken already noted in this report and future work planned for the Museums Voices project and provides a framework for community-focused collections development.

4. Preferred Option

- 4.1 It is proposed that the committee approves the disposal of the objects listed in paragraph 3.4.
- 4.2 To manage the current project efficiently, it is proposed that the committee delegates until April 2025, the decision to dispose of objects that are damaged beyond repair or containing hazardous materials to the Museums Manager in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of this committee.
- 4.3 It is proposed that the reviewed and updated Worcester City and Worcestershire County Museum Collection Development Policies are adopted for the period 2023-2027

5. Alternative Options Considered

- 5.1 Continue to store and care for the listed objects suggested for disposal without planned improvement to collections storage or public access to store. This option would use museum resources to store objects are not suitable for display, research or educational use.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

The Museum Voices project is funded by Arts Council England (£79500) and £4000 from the Marches Network. It is matched by £3000 of the core Museums Worcestershire budgets and £500 from the Museum Membership scheme.

6.2 Legal and Governance Implications

Museums Worcestershire will work with sector-standard documentation, The Collections Trust and both authority's legal teams, where required, to ensure disposals are made correctly.

6.3 Risk Implications

There is a risk to Museums Worcestershire's accreditation status and future grant funding if policies are not reviewed.

6.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

The Collections Development Policies will be updated if agreed by this committee.

6.5 Equality Implications

Equality impact assessments will be undertaken on the Museums Voices project if needed.

6.6 Human Resources Implications

None

6.7 Health and Safety Implications

Appropriate risk assessments will be completed, with advice from both authority's advisers as required.

6.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

The development of collections and the collections store will improve access, representation and opportunity for public engagement, adding to social impact

Ward(s): All Wards
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Supporting documents:
Appendix One Worcester City Museum Collection
Development Policy
Appendix Two Worcestershire County Museum Collection
Development Policy