

**CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES -  
16 SEPTEMBER 2013**

**MUSEUMS SERVICE COLLECTIONS DEVELOPMENT POLICY 2013 - 2018**

**Report by Head of Law and Culture**

**INTRODUCTION**

1. Collections are central to the function of the Museums Service. Their effective management is achieved through a coherent set of policy statements, plans and procedures. These are brought together in the Museums Service Collections Development Policy, previously known as the Acquisition and Disposal Policy, which addresses the need for collections development, information, access, care and conservation.
2. The Collections Development Policy is an essential element in ensuring that the Museums Service is able to meet the standards required in order to retain its current accredited status within the scheme now administered by the Arts Council England.
3. The Service has now been invited to re-new its accredited status under the revised standard introduced in October 2011. As part of the application process the Service is required to review and revise its current Acquisitions and Disposals Policy (2006 -2011) which, to comply with the new standard, is restyled a Collections Development Policy (Annex 1) and to obtain approval for the revised version from its governing body.

**SCOPE AND CONTENT OF THE REVISED POLICY**

4. The Collections Development Policy provides an overview of current collections, identifies themes and priorities for future collecting, for rationalisation and disposal. It provides information about the legal and ethical framework for acquisition and disposal of items. It also identifies key procedures and areas of responsibility in respect of the management of the collection and the role of the governing body in relation to acquisitions and disposals.

**PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE POLICY**

5. Although the contents of the revised Collections Development Policy are broadly comparable to those of the previous Acquisitions and Disposals Policy, they are presented in the format, and in certain areas use wording, as set out in the policy template provided by the Arts Council England which all museums are required to use.

6. Technical changes

- i. In response to the requirements of the new standards for Accreditation, the existing Acquisition and Disposals Policy has been renamed a Collections Development Policy.
- ii. For ease of identification and consistency the Collections Care and Conservation Policy; the Documentation Policy; and the Human Remains Policy, are included as appendices to the Collections Development Policy.

**Focus of future collecting**

7. The Museums Service recognises its responsibility, in acquiring additions to its collections, to ensure that the storage, care of collections, documentation arrangements and use of collections will meet the requirements of the Museum Accreditation standard.
8. The Collections Development Policy 20013 -18 takes account of the need for a more focussed approach to collecting and the need to continue to strengthen the existing collection by disposing of poorer examples if better examples become available, and to actively seek to fill gaps in the collection.
9. The Policy therefore proposes that
  - the Service focuses future collecting on developing existing strengths by putting at its centre the theme of working life, to provide a continuous narrative of the County's rural and industrial past
  - particular consideration be given to collecting from areas of the County that are under- represented and not served by another local museum, for examples significant centres of population such as Bicester or Faringdon , but also some more rurally isolated parts of Oxfordshire.

**Collections rationalisation and disposal**

10. Critical evaluation and collections review is an integral part of all collections management activities. The Collections Management Policy takes account of the need to continue the process, begun under the previous Acquisitions and Disposals Policy, of reviewing and rationalising collections to ensure that we make best use of the available resources.
11. The Policy therefore
  - makes a presumption against collecting items which cannot be displayed, unless they are of sufficient artistic or historical value to justify their preservation
  - requires that consideration is given to developing and improving the collection by disposing of poorer examples if better ones become available
  - requires that archaeological units are actively encouraged, in advance of deposit, to dispose of material that is unlikely to have long-term historic value

- identifies the potential to limit the volume of animal bones and building material deposited from certain archaeological sites
12. It also establishes the priorities for future collection reviews as being:
- The Contemporary Crafts Collection, formerly the Southern Arts Crafts Collection. Originally collected with a view to developing it further as a major element in the displays at Abingdon Museum, following the recent redisplay the collection is no longer required in its entirety and though containing a number of significant pieces it is proposed that the collection is reviewed with the aim of transferring it to a more appropriate institution where it can be appropriately curated, continue to develop and be given greater public access.
  - agricultural implements – a large collection with individual items acquired over a long period of time;
  - animal bone from archaeological excavations – large assemblages recovered from earlier excavations prior to the application of sampling techniques;
  - large stone from archaeological excavations .

## **OUTCOME**

13. By implementing the revised Collections Development Policy the Museums Service will be better able to ensure that it continues to improve the quality and relevance to the people of Oxfordshire, of collections in its care and helps to enable improved public access, enjoyment and understanding to the County's heritage.

## **TRANSFER OWNERSHIP OF LADY NUFFIELD'S MORRIS 8 CAR TO THE NATIONAL TRUST**

14. The Museums Service has received a request from the National Trust to transfer ownership of Lady Nuffield's Morris 8 car to them. The Museum Services' Collections Management Policy 2013 -18 requires a transfer of this nature to be reviewed and approved by the Service's governing body. Annex 2 to this report therefore reviews the circumstances of the original acquisition and makes recommendations as to future ownership, subject to approval being given to the Collections Management Policy.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

15. **The Cabinet Member for Community Services is RECOMMENDED to:**
- (a) approve the Museums Service's Collections Development Policy 2013-2018;**
  - (b) subsequent to the approval of the Museums Service's Collection Development Policy, approve the transfer of Lady Nuffield's Wolsey 8 (accession number OXCMS 1987.44) to the National Trust.**

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Background papers: None

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