

# Cheltenham Borough Council

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 31 March 2025

### Cabinet – 08 April 2025

## Interim Collections Development Policy 2025 - 2027

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#### **Accountable member:**

Councillor Martin Horwood - Cabinet Member Economic Development, Wellbeing and Culture

#### **Accountable officer:**

Richard Gibson - Head of Communities, Wellbeing and Partnerships

#### **Ward(s) affected:**

n/a

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#### **Key Decision:** No

#### **Executive summary:**

The Council is responsible for a significant collection of c.250,000 items across a range of themes; fine art, decorative art, costumes, textiles, social history, plus specific collections including an arts and craft collection, items relating to Gustav Holst and items relating to the Wilson Family.

The items are managed by staff at The Cheltenham Trust (TCT) working at the Wilson Art Gallery & Museum. The obligations on TCT to manage the collection are set out in the management agreement between the Council and TCT.

As The Wilson is an Accredited Museum under the [UK Museum Accreditation Scheme](#) there is an obligation to review the Collections Development Policy on at least a 5-yearly basis to ensure it meets the current standards to retain accreditation.

The current collections development policy was last agreed in October 2019 and is

therefore due for renewal.

The Collection Development Policy uses a standard template from the UK Museum Accreditation Scheme and sets out information relating all aspects of managing the collection including:

- The history of the collection
- Overview of the collection
- Themes and priorities for collecting
- Themes and priorities for rationalisation and disposals.

The Collection Development Policy is brought to Cabinet as an interim policy, that will cover the period from April 2025 to end of March 2027.

Throughout 2025 and 2026 The Wilson is reinterpreting and redisplaying its museum collections galleries as part of the National Lottery Heritage Funded 'Cheltenham's BIG Museum Project'. This project includes a year-long public consultation which will form their understanding of the communities they serve and the objects and stories they connect with.

Once the museum collections galleries reopen, the Collections Development Policy will be reviewed and developed using the data collected from Cheltenham's BIG Museum Project.

**Recommendations: That Cabinet:**

- 1. approves the updated Interim Collections Development Policy (2025-2027) attached as Appendix 2 which will run for a two-year period to end of March 2027;**
- 2. approves the two supporting policy statements; the interim collections care and conservation policy and the interim collection documentation policy attached as Appendices 3 and 4;**
- 3. endorses the specific section of the collection development policy in relation to archaeology whereby the Wilson will no longer accept archaeological finds from outside Cheltenham borough boundaries – see Section 5;**
- 4. deaccessions\* Tram 21, subject to a viable plan being agreed, that secures the tram's future in Cheltenham, makes it accessible to the public and allows Tram 21's story to be told – see Section 6**

*\*deaccession in the context of arts collections is the is the process by which a work of art or other object is permanently removed from a museum's collection in order that it is disposed of.*

## 1. Implications

### 1.1 Financial, Property and Asset implications

There are no new direct financial or property implications associated with the recommendation to approve the updated collections development policy and the two supporting policy statements.

[gemma.bell@cheltenham.gov.uk](mailto:gemma.bell@cheltenham.gov.uk).

### 1.2 Legal implications

There are no direct legal implications as a result of this report.

**Signed off by:** One Legal – [legalservices@onelegal.org.uk](mailto:legalservices@onelegal.org.uk)

### 1.3 Environmental and climate change implications

The completed dashboard and summary report are attached as **appendix 5**. The collections development policy is generally neutral in its contribution to environmental outcomes, though has some positive contribution to be made to social outcomes.



Maizy McCann, Climate Officer, [Maizy.McCann@cheltenham.gov.uk](mailto:Maizy.McCann@cheltenham.gov.uk)

## 1.4 Corporate Plan Priorities

The collection development policy contributes to the following Corporate Plan Priority:

- Ensuring residents, communities and businesses benefit from Cheltenham's future growth and prosperity

## 1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

The completed community impact assessment is attached as **appendix 6**. The action from the impact assessment is to deliver Big Museum consultation project and reflect on what this tells us in relation to the future iteration of the collections development policy.

## 1.6 Performance management – monitoring and review

The Wilson Art Gallery & Museum is currently an accredited museum under the UK Museum Accreditation Scheme. The indicator of successful performance will be the retaining of its status as an accredited museum.

The work of the Cheltenham Trust to manage the Council's collections is reviewed regularly via the Joint Quarterly Liaison Group meeting and via a joint operational group meeting.

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## 2 Background

2.5 The Museums' Association definition of a museum (1998) states: "Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society."

2.6 This definition includes art galleries with collections of works of art, as well as museums with historical collections of objects.

2.7 [Museum Accreditation](#) is the UK Standard for museums and galleries. The Scheme safeguards long-term access to public collections and provides a framework for ethical museum practice. It links directly with Spectrum - the UK collections management standard, and the [Museums Association Code of Ethics](#).

2.8 Achieving the Accreditation standard has many benefits for a museum helping them to:

- Improve planning skills;
- Assess achievements;
- Improve morale;
- Raise awareness to stakeholders;
- Attract financial support from external sources; and
- Show their fitness to receive sponsorship and donations

2.9 The Wilson, previously known as Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum, has been an Accredited Museum since 2005.

2.10 To comply with the requirements of the accreditation scheme, the Wilson has an obligation (every five years) to review its existing Collections Development Policy and ensure it meets the current standard to obtain accreditation. This was last reviewed in October 2019 and therefore needs to be reviewed.

### **3. The Collections Development Policy**

3.1. The Collections Development Policy is a requirement of the Museums Association in order to obtain accredited museums status. It is described as: “A policy, approved by the governing body, for developing collections, including acquisitions and disposals”. It includes:

- The museums statement of purpose;
- An overview of current collections;
- Themes and priorities for future collecting;
- Priorities for rationalisation and disposal;
- Information about the legal and ethical framework for acquiring and disposing of items; and
- The date when the policy will be reviewed.

3.2. As custodians of the collection, the Council needs to approve the Collections Development Policy. This is an update of the existing policy that was approved by [Cabinet in 2019](#) and brings it in line with latest national guidance and best practice.

3.3. The attached Collections Development Policy is brought to Cabinet as an interim policy, that will cover the period from April 2025 to end of March 2027. This will enable community input from the Big Museum Project to be incorporated in the

next iteration of the Collections Development Policy.

- 3.4. There are very few changes from the 2019 policy apart from the specific changes associated with archaeology and the Tram that are referenced in the body of this report.
- 3.5. The Interim Care and Conservation Policy (attached as **appendix 3**) sets out the way the Collections Development Policy will be put into action to ensure that The Wilson fulfils its preservation and stewardship responsibilities for items in the collections.
- 3.6. The Interim Collections Documentation Policy (attached as **appendix 4**) sets out how Wilson staff will ensure that the information they hold relating to the collections is accurate, secure, reliable, accessible, and up to date. To achieve this, they will follow the Spectrum Standards published by the Museums Association.

#### **4. The BIG Museum Project**

- 4.1. The Cheltenham Trust has secured funding to undertake a programme of significant community engagement to shape the future of the Museum. Called the [BIG Museum project](#), there are three phases:

##### **4.2. Phase One – Community consultations**

- 4.3. A broad range of consultations both at The Wilson and in local communities which will be used to inform phase two of the project.

##### **4.4. Phase Two – Testing ideas with communities**

- 4.5. This part of the project will see the launch of the Cheltenham's BIG Museum Project: Test Space. To include:

- An interactive exhibition designed to shape the future of the museum.
- A community outreach programme through the 'Museum on Wheels' mobile feedback stations.

##### **4.6. Phase Three – Reopening the museum and reviewing the collection development policy**

- 4.7. Feedback collected throughout the year within the Test Space and mobile stations will contribute to the design and curation and interpretation of the new museum.

- 4.8. Once the museum collections galleries reopen, the Collections Development Policy will be reviewed and developed using the data collected from Cheltenham's BIG Museum Project and brought back to Cabinet for approval.

## **5. Archaeology**

- 5.1. The Wilson accepts archaeological material collected from the parish and local councils of Cheltenham. This is a small but significant part of the collection. Since the 1990's The Wilson has also been accepting material from a number of parishes from outside the Cheltenham area.
- 5.2. The Wilson currently has a storage challenge following decades of non-selective accessioning which has meant that The Wilson is at capacity. To manage this storage challenge, the Wilson will no longer accept archaeological depositions from outside the Cheltenham area. It is worth noting that all archaeological repositories in Gloucestershire are at capacity, with many no longer accepting archaeological material.
- 5.3. For instance, without taking the decision not to accept archaeological depositions from outside the Cheltenham, The Wilson could have to accept around 400 boxes of Tewkesbury Borough material from 22 sites in the Tewkesbury Borough area.
- 5.4. While material from outside of Cheltenham is important for the archaeological record, the Wilson is focused on sharing the history and heritage of Cheltenham with its visitors. This approach enables The Wilson to increase access to its collection by displaying archaeological material from within the Cheltenham area. The Wilson will retain the option to borrow any significant finds from outside the Cheltenham area if they are relevant to any temporary exhibitions.

## **6. Tram 21**

- 6.1. The Cheltenham no. 21 Tram was the last surviving tram to have operated on the Cheltenham & District Light Railway tramway system – running from 1921 to 1930.
- 6.2. Since then, the tram has been in private ownership, displayed in museums and was returned to storage in Cheltenham in 1992. The tram is now in storage at the depot under the care of The Cheltenham Trust.
- 6.3. The current condition of the tram is poor. The tram is in storage in two sections. The top deck has been deconstructed and the remaining body stored on a trailer. The tram is missing its truck so only the body of the tram is present. Whilst in fairly good visual condition the tram has deteriorated over the years and could

not be put on display in its current form. Paintwork is peeling, some external metalwork is corroded and several plywood panels have delaminated and bowed out of shape.

- 6.4. Whilst the storage conditions are currently stable, it is anticipated that the tram will continue to deteriorate without any intervention.
- 6.5. It has been widely recognised that the future of the Tram poses a dilemma for the Council in how to find a suitable location and use to secure its longer-term future.

## **Proposal**

- 6.6. After over 30 years in storage in Cheltenham, it is time to explore future options for the tram and to deaccession Tram 21, subject to a viable plan being agreed that secures the tram's future in Cheltenham, makes it accessible to the public and allows Tram 21's story to be told.

## **7. Reasons for recommendations**

- 7.1. Failure to update the Collections Development Policy risks the Wilson failing to retain the Accreditation Standard required by the Museums Association. This could result in the museum being constrained in its current operation and could hamper access to grant-making organisations, sponsors and donors.
- 7.2. Cheltenham Borough Council is the custodian for the Wilson collection and therefore ultimately responsible for its management.

## **8 Alternative options considered**

- 8.1 Do nothing could result in loss of accreditation for the museum and would impact on its ability to function as a reputable museum.

## **9 Consultation and feedback**

- 9.1 The interim collections development policy was shared with Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 31 March 2025.
- 9.2 Verbal feedback can be provided at the Cabinet meeting.
- 9.3 Detailed consultation will be undertaken with the community as part of the Big Museum project and this will then inform the next version of the collections development policy.

## 10 Key risks

10.1 There are two risks associated with not having an up to date collections development policy; one risk that the Wilson could lose the Accreditation Standard required by the Museums Association resulting in the museum being constrained in its current operation and a further risk that the reputation of TCT and the Council could be undermined.

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### Report author:

Richard Gibson, Head of communities, wellbeing & partnerships

### Appendices:

- i. Risk Assessment
- ii. Interim Collections Development Policy
- iii. Collections Care and Conservation Policy
- iv. Collections Documentation Policy
- v. Climate Change Impact Assessment
- vi. Equality Impact Assessment – Screening

### Background information:

[Museum Accreditation Collections Development Policy and Deaccession Process – report to Cabinet 8 October 2019](#)

**Appendix 1: Risk Assessment**

Risk ref	Risk description	Risk owner	Impact score (1-5)	Likelihood score (1-5)	Initial raw risk score (1 - 25)	Risk response	Controls / Mitigating actions	Control / Action owner	Deadline for controls/ actions
	If The Cheltenham Trust and Council fail to update the Collections Development Policy there is a risk that the Wilson will fail to retain the Accreditation Standard required by the Museums Association resulting in the museum being constrained in its current operation	Claire Hughes	3	2	6	Reduce	Update policy in accordance with Museum Accreditation Scheme requirements and seek Cabinet approval on 8 <sup>th</sup> April 2025	Richard Gibson	April 2025
	If the museum fails to achieve accreditation then the reputation of the TCT and the Council as custodians for the museum collections will be undermined.	Claire Hughes	3	2	6	Reduce	Update policy in accordance with Museum Accreditation Scheme requirements and seek Cabinet approval on 8 <sup>th</sup> April 2025	Richard Gibson	April 2025