

Overview and Scrutiny

31 March 2025

Member questions

Agenda item 9: Interim Collections Development Policy 2025-2027

1. Question from Councillor Jackie Chelin

Will the tram be included as part of the Big Museum project consultation

Response from the curatorial team at The Wilson

Best practice when working with communities is to ensure that we are not 'leading' audiences by trying to influence their thoughts or feelings. With this in mind, we have decided to not ask audiences about particular objects, rather we should be led by stories. So if 'transport' is a popular story for our audiences we can then dig deeper into how we share that story, what collections we have which represent it etc. If we start asking about particular objects we are asking leading questions and therefore the data that we receive will not be a true representation of the thoughts and feelings of Cheltenham's communities. When undertaking public consultation it is really important to think deeply about what we are asking our audiences and what we want the outcome of the consultation to be.

We also need to consider the logistics of the objects and building within the consultation. The tram is a large object and does not fit within the Wilson building, so consideration would be needed for how we make it accessible and the financial implications of that decision.

2. Question from Councillor Jackie Chelin

What might be the financial implications (and therefore the implications for the Wilson staff) of the museum failing to retain the Accreditation Standard?

Response from the curatorial team at The Wilson

Accreditation has helped build trust in museums for over 35 years. Getting Accredited status by meeting the Standard is a significant achievement and is an endorsement that a museum is a responsible custodian of public collections, managing them for people to enjoy now and in the future. 1738 UK museums are currently Accredited, with well over 100 working towards applying for the status of Accreditation.

Gaining Accreditation aids accountability by providing clear lines of responsibility and supports museums to develop their services through forward planning and goal setting. Funders, lenders, donors understand an Accreditation award as the mark of a museum that has a solid foundation.

Accreditation increases our ability to apply to different funding bodies, who will not support non-accredited museum funding requests, or cap the amount that can be applied for by non-accredited museums. We would not be eligible for any major funders including Arts Council and National Lottery Heritage, or the new funds recently announced by DCMS such as the £85 million Creative Foundations Fund or the £20 million Museum Renewal Fund and we would lose our exemption for VAT.

It also enables us to borrow objects and artworks from other accredited museums and art galleries, thus being able to deliver high quality exhibitions for the people of Cheltenham. Without it we would face a huge increase in insurance costs and would not qualify for GIS therefore could not take touring exhibitions, loans and would not be insured many valuable items within the collection.

Not retaining our accreditation status may cause reputational damage to the Wilson as almost all accredited museums want to retain their accreditation and we would be considered an outlier within the sector if we chose not to retain it.

3. Question from Councillor Jackie Chelin

What consideration has been given to the issue of “decolonisation” (if appropriate) in the policy?

Response from the curatorial team at The Wilson

Arts Council England are currently redesigning the Accreditation Scheme in order to improve the user experience of the Accreditation process. This will include enhancing the benefits of participation. At its very best, Accreditation provides a useful check and helps those running museums and those with oversight to be accountable, take stock, and plan for a responsive and relevant museum. This will include updating the Accreditation Standard, which may include updating the policy templates all museums use as part of the Accreditation process. This may include a stronger focus on decolonisation within the policies.

The policies being considered by the Committee and Cabinet are interim updates while we undertake the public consultation for Cheltenham’s BIG Museum Project (CBMP). CBMP will give us a mandate from Cheltenham’s communities for how they want to have the Wilson’s collections shaped and developed which may include a focus on the subject of decolonisation.