

SUBJECT: Tourism, Leisure, Culture and Youth – Review of Collections Development Policy

MEETING: Individual Cabinet Member Decision – Cllr Bob Greenland

DATE:

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: Not Applicable

1. PURPOSE:

To approve an updated Collections Development Policy for the Museums Service

Please note the current Document is titled Collections Development Policy Monmouthshire Museums 2016-2021. As a result of these changes we would like to update its title to Collections Development Policy Monmouthshire Museums 2019-2024.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

To agree the suggested changes.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1. Our Collections Development Policy sets out how we will collect and care for our museum collections. The current one runs from 2016 – 2021 and is based on a Museum standard. It was approved by Individual Cabinet Member Decision in 2016 and then as part of the Museum Accreditation process (a UK wide museum standards scheme).
- 3.2. During a review of the Collections Development Policy in December 2018 we became aware that some of our definitions were ambiguous. For example in the section on the overview of current collections;
- *“Photographs of Abergavenny and surrounding district”*
 - *“Social history material of local interest, relating to Caldicot and the surrounding villages”.*
 - *“The main emphasis is on items that relate specifically to Chepstow and the surrounding district, either in their production, use, origin, ownership or subject matter”.*
 - *“Items with a relevance to the history of Chepstow up to and including the present”.*

and under ‘The policy for agreeing acquisitions’:

- *The basic principle for accepting artefacts is that they should relate to the town and local area surrounding each museum.*

Terms such as ‘surrounding district’ ‘local interest’ ‘relating’ and ‘relevance’ are ill – defined and means it is difficult to be precise about what artefacts should be considered for the collection.

It was agreed between the Museums Manager, the Museums Curator and the Objects Conservator that we needed to review and tighten up these definitions.

- 3.3. The following definitions were agreed and we have included these within our revised Collections Development Policy as a new section at the end of the document - Section 17, titled 'Definition of terms relating to the collection:

Definition of terms relating to the collection:

- The basic principle for accepting artefacts is that they should relate to the town and local area surrounding each museum i.e. they should contribute to the story of Monmouthshire.
- Local area is considered to be any area that sits within the county of Monmouthshire as it stands in March 2019. However the county border of Monmouthshire has changed over time and we hold in our collections items that may currently sit outside the county. There are also items, which due to the historical landscape may form part of a town's story even though they lie outside the town, and in some cases in a different county or even country. It is presumed that we will continue to collect such items if they relate to an existing collection, but any such acquisitions should be discussed with the appropriate museum that lies within that area. Section 7 in the Collections Development Policy already deals with this.
- An object is considered to relate to the town and local area if:
 - It was produced/made in the area
 - It was used in the area by a named person or at a named place.
 - It originated from the area – i.e. was part of a local business, organisation or the built heritage e.g. a cornflake packet from Basil Jones or a fireplace from a local building. NB: This is not a reason on its own to collect it. There should be other evidence of local association alongside.
 - Ownership – a named person with an association to the area owned it. NB: This is not a reason on its own to collect it. There should be other evidence of local association alongside.
 - Its subject matter represents the locality e.g. a painting, poem or piece of music relating to Chepstow Castle. It should either be a work of artistic merit in its own right, or by an artist of note, or it could be a work more important for its content and topographical detail than its artistic worth or authorship.

There are other items that do not fit into the above categories but may be considered for inclusion:

- It illustrates the way people lived in the area. NB: This is not a sufficient reason to collect new items. Whilst in the past it was deemed sufficient, now it is important for museums to collect the stories surrounding the object about the people who owned, used or made it, and what makes it part of (in our case) Monmouthshire's story. However, it may be enough to justify retention depending on certain factors, e.g. condition, context in the collection and suitability for display.
 - Consideration should also be given to whether there is an existing representation of it in the collection. For example it would be appropriate in most cases for only one example of an item to be collected and a further example collected only if we were offered a better example, e.g. a paper item in better condition.
- 3.4. During our review of this document, the question of covenants attached to some collections was raised. To address this point 5.3 has been added under the section Themes and Priorities for Disposal and Rationalisation:

Any items in our collections which are part of a covenant or bequest need to be considered separately.

- 3.5. During this review it also came to our notice that under the section on Monmouth Museum regarding Future Collecting we had made the decision that there would be no active collecting. This was because at the time of writing there was no Curator at Monmouth Museum. As the position has now changed this has been updated as follows:

Monmouth - Future Collecting

- *Archaeology from organised excavations from the local town:*
- *A stronger Monmouthshire wide focus by collecting material relevant to surrounding villages*
- *Items, which tell the story of the 20th century in Monmouth and the surrounding area.*
- *Items with a relevance to the history of Monmouth up to and including the present.*

(Please note at Caldicot Castle we do not operate an active collecting policy. The reasons for this have not changed and are outlined within the Collections Development Policy.)

In line with the changes at Monmouth we have updated the Future Collecting Section for Abergavenny and Chepstow. So the following has been added:

Abergavenny – Future Collecting

- *A stronger Monmouthshire wide focus by collecting material relevant to surrounding villages*
- *Items with a relevance to the history of Abergavenny up to and including the present.*

Chepstow – Future Collecting

- *Items which tell the story of the 20th century in Chepstow and the surrounding area*

4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

The work we do in the Museums Service holds the wellbeing of our Future Generations and our responsibility for Social Justice at its very heart. It is well documented that participation in cultural life improves peoples well being and this is something we consider throughout our work. By having a better-defined Collections Development Policy we will ensure we are collecting items artefacts that tell the story of Monmouthshire not just for for our current audiences and communities but also for our future generations. In using the Collections Development Policy to decide if we should add to our collections we consider all types of people that form part of the story of Monmouthshire to ensure a full and complete story is told.

We have limited storage space in our museums and staff to care for our artefacts. It is therefore important that we consider what items we add to the collections so that we can ensure that we have the resources in place to preserve them for the very long term future.

Telling the stories of all our communities through the artefacts we collect for future generations is important in making our communities feel connected and whilst we already work closely with our communities there be scope in the future to look at aspects of our communities where we have not got such a good representation of our artefacts. We are looking to carry out a Collections Review of all our collections and this will contribute to this work.

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 5.1 A more defined set of collecting criteria means the museum service can be certain it is collecting items that will tell the story of Monmouthshire for our audiences today and for future generations.
- 5.2 Considered collecting means we can be more confident that we have the resources in place to ensure that we are able to care for the artefacts for our audiences today and for future generations.

6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

This is a working document and its suitability will be tested during our decision making process when accepting items into the collection (or not accepting them).

7. REASONS:

It is the role of Monmouthshire Museums to tell the story of our county, not just the main towns but the surrounding villages, and, where it relates to our story, that of the adjoining counties and countries. It is important that we consider carefully the artefacts that we need to tell this story. In addition like museums across the UK our object stores are full and our ability to continually rotate objects via exhibitions is limited. There is also a scarcity in resources in terms of cataloguing and caring for our objects. Responsible curating means assessing very carefully every item that we add to the collection, so we can ensure that we have the means to care for it for the very long term future.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

There are no resource implications.

9. CONSULTEES:

- Cabinet member for TLCY
- Enterprise DMT
- Head of TLCY
- Museums Curator
- Object Conservator
- Museum Development Adviser – Welsh Government, Museums Archive Libraries Division

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Revised Collections Development Policy (all changes in red to clearly indicate)

11. AUTHOR: Rachael Rogers, Museums Manager

12. CONTACT DETAILS:

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