

SUBJECT: MUSEUM SERVICE COLLECTIONS RATIONALISATION

MEETING: INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER DECISION – CLLR SARA BURCH

DATE: 14th January 2026

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: NOT APPLICABLE

1. PURPOSE:

To approve the deaccessioning and disposal of selected items from the collections and reference library of Monmouthshire Museums to ensure:

- Everything we have in the collections relates to our Collections Development Policy.
- We are more informed of our future storage needs.
- Our museum reference library contains relevant literature and not outdated knowledge

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To agree the deaccessioning of and disposal actions for the museum objects listed in Appendix 2 (Actions are in line with the Collection Development Policy from the Museum in Appendix 3).

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 Accredited museums act within an agreed legal and ethical framework and have approved policies for developing their collections. This ensures that the public continue to have access to public collections – and that they continue to trust museums as responsible long-term guardians. Collections review; rationalisation and disposal are part of responsible collections management.
- 3.2 Accessioning is the process of formally recording that the governing body has taken legal ownership of objects and has committed to care for them over the long term. Deaccessioning is the formal decision by a governing body to take objects out of its accessioned collection and manage the disposal of those objects through an agreed method.
- 3.3 Collections rationalisation is a procedure whereby a museum improves its understanding of a collection so that the collection can be used more effectively for the benefit of its users. The need to rationalise a collection is driven by many different factors, and may include uncontrolled collecting in the past, increasing pressures on storage space or the need to meet organisational priorities.
- 3.4 Controlled rationalisation enables museums to develop a systematic and strategic approach to effective management and increased use of their collections, allowing them to maximise resources, refocus collecting activity and increase public access. Although one clear outcome

of a programme of rationalisation can lead to deaccessioning and the disposal of objects, rationalisation can also provide ways of considering new and different uses for collections.

3.5 The Accreditation Scheme for museums and galleries in the UK encourages museums to consider rationalisation as a way to address collections management issues facing museums and make collections accessible to visitors and users. A museum's approach to rationalisation will be articulated in its Collections Development Policy which will include detail on the museum's themes and priorities for collections.

3.6 There are many benefits to collections rationalisation:

- Ensuring that collections are relevant to the museum's vision and strategic objectives which may have evolved over time with historic collections now not fit for the current purpose of the museum
- Developing a clearer understanding of the collections the museum holds
- Determining the significance of objects in a collection
- Enabling effective collections development, including contemporary collecting
- Maximising resources – storage space, staffing and running costs, to care effectively for collections
- Developing priorities for collections care
- Improving storage and management of reserve collections
- Focusing collections, so that they are of high quality and relevant to users and stakeholders
- Providing increased access to collections
- Using collections within the museum and with partners in different ways
- Enhancing knowledge and information about collections and improving documentation

Please note these principals are taken from guidance documents published by Collections Trust (the UK body for museum documentation standards) and Arts Council England (the body that oversees Accreditation - the Museum Standard across the UK)

3.7 Managing the disposal of objects needs to be done both ethically and in response to organisational strategy. Rationalising a collection is a lengthy process; items need to be assessed, and if they are no longer relevant to the museum, where they go next needs to be assessed.

Section 4 of the Museums Association Disposal Toolkit provides full detail of acceptable methods of disposal. In brief these are:

- Transfer to an Accredited Museum
- Exchange of items between museums
- Transfer to another institution/organisation within the public domain
- Return to donor
- Sale to an accredited museum
- Transfer outside the public domain
- Sale outside the public domain
- Recycling of an item
- Destruction of an item

(In most instances the procedures would be followed in the order set out above, i.e. Transfer to Accredited Museum being the first procedure and destruction of an item being the last)

The following should be of key consideration when selecting a method of disposal:

- there is a strong presumption for keeping items within the public domain
- there is a strong preference for gift or transfer to other accredited museums and items should be offered to them in the first instance
- action should be taken that ensure continued public trust in museums.

3.8 There may be a negative impact of antipathy and distrust of the service by people who thought items would be looked after in perpetuity. We will carry out the following procedures to mitigate this risk:

- Always Follow Museum Ethical Guidelines.
- We will provide updates on the process to ensure that members of the public are aware of what we are doing at all times.
- We will keep any bodies that have provided funding towards the purchase or conservation of objects updated and consult with them at relevant stages.

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

4.1 The work of the Museum Service holds the wellbeing of our Future Generations at its very heart. It is well documented that participation in cultural life improves people's wellbeing and this is something considered throughout the service's work. Collections rationalisation ensures that resources are being targeted appropriately, we are caring for our collections appropriately and the artefacts we care for are telling the stories of our communities. If the method of disposal chosen is to transfer an item to another community, then those communities also benefit by being able to tell their story better.

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

<i>Option</i>	<i>Benefit</i>	<i>Risk</i>	<i>Comment</i>
To dispose of two large collections of newspapers and items from the museums reference library.	Free up much needed storage space Items would be transferred to an institution which is able to provide more frequent public access and better facilities for care	<i>None</i>	Additional disposal lists may be necessary as this work continues in 2026.
Retain the collection.	<i>None</i>	In the near future we would need to invest in new packaging for the newspapers for them to be stored in the new stores.	

		Keeping duplicate and unused reference books would limit the amount of space we have to acquire more relevant books.	
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6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

6.1 We have referred to industry standards and best practice throughout and have consulted the following documents to help inform the review:

- Spectrum 5.0 (The UK Museums' Collection Management Standard) 'Collections Review' and 'Deaccessioning and disposal' chapters
- Museums Association Disposal Toolkit
- University College London Collections Review Toolkit (https://www.ucl.ac.uk/culture/sites/culture/files/cr_toolkit_final.pdf)
- Collections Trust: A guide to selecting a review methodology for collections rationalisation
- CyMAL (2013) why do we have it- A significance process and template (CyMAL is the predecessor to MALD: Museums Archives and Libraries Wales – Welsh Government)
- South East Museum Development Programme: A guide to Collections Review and Rationalisation.
- SHARE Museums East: Collections Rationalisation: Planning for action
- Lessons Learnt: MonLife Heritage Museums' Collections Review 2019-2022

7. REASONS:

Rationalisation is a routine part of museum collections management. According to the Museum Association, rationalisation is used to ensure our museums are “relevant to the communities we serve” and “financially and environmentally sustainable”. Any disposal of collections that takes place is done according to strict guidelines as set out by the Museums Association in their Code of Ethics.

In preparation for the move to Shire Hall we have reviewed our collections, including the reference library.

- A collection of local newspapers. We do not have the facilities and capacity to care for it or provide access in the way larger archives are able to. We have spoken to various archives including Gwent Archives and the National Library of Wales about an appropriate home. The National Library of Wales has indicated its interest in the collection. If we transfer the collection to them, they will provide a comprehensive access via their cataloguing system and in person (their infrastructure allows direct in person access to the newspapers)
- Parts of our Reference Library consisting of duplicate books and those not used since digital tools have made information more widely available. Some of the books do not include the latest information or are about old technologies we no longer use. Monmouth Library has previously taken some reference books and will be the first point of disposal for the books in this list. Any they don't want will then be offered to local second-hand sellers around the area. This will maintain them in the local community and rehome, so nothing is lost.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

The work is part of the Shire Hall redevelopment project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

A collections assistant has been leading the work of selecting, researching and proposing objects to the rest of the collections and curatorial staff. Their work has also been funded by the NLHF.

There might be a transport cost for the newspaper collection depending on the receiver's budget to move it themselves.

Not agreeing with the recommendation would mean maintaining the current cost of storing them, as well as potential future cost of re boxing, and cost of making them accessible for the public.

9. CONSULTEES:

Cabinet member for Rural Affairs, Housing and Tourism
Place and Community Wellbeing DMT
Museum Staff
National Library of Wales

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Appendix 1: Equality and Future Generations Evaluation

Appendix 2: Recommendation for Disposal

Appendix 3: Collections Development Policy. MonLife Heritage Museums. 2024-2029

Appendix 4: Collection's Review Scoring grid

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