

Norfolk Joint Museums Committee

Report title:	Collections Review and Rationalisation Programme
Date of meeting:	5 April 2019
Responsible Officer:	Steve Miller, Assistant Director, Culture and Heritage
Strategic impact This report sets out the background to the ongoing review of collections at NMS and recommends deaccessioning a group of social history items from Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse, Norwich Social History and Great Yarmouth Museums in accordance with the NMS Collections Management Strategy 2018-22, which incorporates the NMS Collections Development Policy (Appendix 1). The Collecting Policy for Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse is outlined (Appendix 2) and Norwich Social History (Appendix 3) Great Yarmouth Museums (appendix 4).	

Executive summary

As part of its strategy to review service needs and reduce costs Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) has an ongoing Collections Review & Rationalisation programme whereby collections are reviewed on a regular basis, and those which are not suitable for future display or study needs may be found alternative homes.

The programme follows best practice as advised by Arts Council England's Museums Accreditation Standard and the Museums Association's Code of Ethics standards of which have been incorporated into the NMS Collections Development Policy. The outline of which is noted in Appendix 1.

Recommendations:

Committee Members are asked to consider and approve the rationalisation of:

- **The Norwich Social History items listed in Appendix 5**
- **The Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse objects listed in Appendix 6**
- **The Great Yarmouth Museums objects listed in Appendix 7**

1. Proposal (or options)

- 1.1. The Joint Museums Committee is asked to consider and recommend for rationalisation:
- The Norwich Social History items listed in Appendix 5
 - The Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse objects listed in Appendix 6
 - The Great Yarmouth Museums objects listed in Appendix 7

2. Evidence

- 2.1. Collections Development Strategy – Appendix 1 to this report

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1. The review and submission of this strategy is fully funded through Arts Council

England's National Portfolio Organisation funding. There are no other revenue implications.

4. Issues, risks and innovation

- 4.1. An ongoing review of these collections is being undertaken in order to :
- Improve access to the collections as a whole
 - Release storage space and resources to allow improved collections management
 - Ensure collections retained are in line with current NMS collecting policy and rehome museum objects to institutions in line with their collecting policies.
 - Remove threats posed by possible insect infestation
 - Remove threats posed by inappropriate storage conditions

5. Background

- 5.1 The objects listed in Appendices 5,6,7 are from the Gressenhall & Farm and Workhouse Collections and the Norwich Social History Collections and recommended for rationalisation by the methods proposed against each object.

The objects have been scrutinised by NMS' internal Rationalisation Committee, which comprised the Chief Curator, departmental Curator, Collections Development Manager, Registrar, Head of Conservation, Collections Development Officer and Documentation Officer. The objects have been reviewed by the members of the respective Area Museums Committees: Norwich 5.3.2019, Breckland 18.3.2019, Gt Yarmouth 29.1.2019.

Collecting and rationalisation within the NMS is undertaken in accordance with the Collections Development Policy approved by the Joint Museums Committee (Appendix 1) and the Museums Association Code of Ethics. This Collections Development Policy is reviewed every five years and sets out the strengths of the collections, areas for future collecting and constraints on collecting, such as resources, space and expertise. As part of a responsible collections management strategy the NMS undertakes regular reviews of its collections to ensure that material is properly classified and adequately housed. Objects that are deemed unsuitable for retention as part of the core collection are identified and alternative homes found.

- 5.2 To summarise the collections review process, material is proposed for rationalisation which:
- Does not fall within the current collecting policy
 - Is of good quality but would fit better into another organisation's collections (including those of Norfolk Record Office and Norfolk Library & Information Service)
 - Does not provide important information about Norfolk and its history
 - Has no reasonable expectation of being useful for display or research
 - Has been unethically acquired
 - Is unprovenanced (i.e. has no background information to provide a context)
 - Is of poor quality compared with other examples in the collection

- Has deteriorated beyond any useful purpose (e.g. through decay or infestation. This might be a natural history specimen that has suffered pest infestation)
- Poses a threat to other objects or people (e.g. by contamination. This might be WW2 gas masks with degraded asbestos filters or radioactive geological specimens)
- Is an unnecessary duplicate
- Offers no reasonable expectation that NMS will be able to provide suitable levels of curation or collections care.

Meeting one of the above criteria does not automatically condemn any object. Each will be considered on its merits. There may well be good reasons why objects that fall into one or more of the above categories should be kept, but they will be critically examined and justified in line with the NMS Collections Development Policy and the Museums Association Code of Ethics.

5.3 Options for disposal:

There are several proposals offered in the MA Code of Ethics in which material that is not suitable for the NMS core collections might continue to fulfil a useful purpose including:

- Transfer to another Accredited museum by gift
- Transfer to another public institution by gift
- Return to donor or lender
- Repatriation to country of origin
- Charitable donation
- Set dressing or adapted to repair working objects
- Sale on the open market, or
- Destruction (as a last resort)

Any income generated by sales of objects is allocated to a ring-fenced fund for the purchase of new collections or the care of existing collections.

5.4 Once Committee has agreed the list of proposed disposals the following steps will be taken:

- As required by the conditions of the Museum Accreditation Scheme, and the Museums Association Code of Ethics a notice will be placed in the Museums Journal or on-line equivalent, and any other appropriate specialist publication, advertising the availability of significant material to other Accredited museums.
- Direct contact will be made with any Accredited museums or other public institutions that would have a particular interest in any of the objects.
- If no Accredited museum is interested and the material was donated within the last 20 years, attempts will be made to contact the donor to return the item.
- Non Accredited museums will be considered for potential rehoming of objects, this will be reviewed on a case by case basis by the NMS Rationalisation Committee
- Material in which no interest is expressed will be either returned to the core collections, sold at auction or destroyed; these options are reviewed on a case by case basis by the Rationalisation Committee.
- Complete records of all transactions and processes will be kept.

6. Conclusion

The collections review is proposing to remove items in appendices 5, 6 & 7 which are of minimal relevance to the collections policies and remit of the relevant curatorial departments and will free up space and resources for the benefit of the remaining collections and the wider public benefit.

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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